MYSTERIES
KNUT HAMSUN

The underlying thought of *Mysteries* is the utter and incurable solitariness of the human creature, and hence the futility of words, gestures, all our baffled and groping attempts to explain. The tragedy is that individual identities are incommunicable; and the last turn of the screw is that one can sometimes not even understand one's own deeper realities. Dagny is a tragic figure not only because she cannot understand Nagel, but also because she does not comprehend the quality or the depth of her own love for him.

In the great cycle of Hamsun's development *Mysteries* follows *Hunger* and precedes *Pan*. Taken together, these three unconnected novels reveal one act of the author's own spiritual drama. They record an early stage of abnormal sensitiveness to life's great and little ironies. But it is the sensitiveness of the strong, not of the weak; and under the troubled surface of these waters we begin already to feel the undertow of power that in the end means *Growth of the Soil*.

Scranton's
Reading Club

414

University of Florida Libraries

The Gift of
Marjorie K. Rawlings

COLLEGE LIBRARY

Mysteries

THE WORKS OF

KNUT HAMSUN

Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature 1920

BENONI

ROSA

HUNGER
(*Sult*) With an introduction by Edwin Björkman

GROWTH OF THE SOIL
(*Markens Gröde*) with an essay on Hamsun by W. W. Worster

PAN
With an introduction by Edwin Björkman

SHALLOW SOIL
(*Ny Ford*)
With an introductory essay by Carl Christian Hyllested

DREAMERS
(*Svaermere*)

WANDERERS
(*Under Höstjaernen* and *En Vendrer Spiller med Sordin*)
With an introduction by Edwin Björkman

VICTORIA

CHILDREN OF THE AGE
(*Börn av Tiden*)

SEGELFOSS TOWN
(*Segelfoss By*)

IN THE GRIP OF LIFE
(*A Play*)

MYSTERIES
(*Mysterier*)

Mysteries

Translated from the Norwegian of

KNUT HAMSUN

by Arthur G. Chater

NEW YORK & LONDON

Alfred · A · Knopf

MCMXXVII

839.8236
H232my Ec
c. 2

COPYRIGHT 1927, BY ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

Originally published
as
MYSTERIER
Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 1892

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Mysteries

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011

http://www.archive.org/details/mysteries00hams

I

IN the middle of the summer of 1891 a little Norwegian coast town was the scene of a series of most unusual events. A stranger turned up in the town, a certain Nagel, a noteworthy and original charlatan, who did a heap of odd things and vanished again as suddenly as he had come. This man even had a visit from a young and mysterious lady, who came on God knows what business and only ventured to stay a couple of hours in the place. But all this is not the beginning——

The beginning is that when the steamer came alongside the quay at six in the evening, three passengers appeared on deck, among them a man in a loud buff suit and a large velvet cap. This was on the evening of the 12th of June; for on that day many flags were flying in the town in honour of Fröken Kielland's engagement, which was made public on that very 12th of June. The porter from the Central Hotel went aboard at once and the man in the buff suit handed him his baggage; at the same time he gave up his ticket to one of the ship's officers, but having done that he started strolling up and down the deck without going ashore. He seemed to be in a state of great excitement. When the third bell rang, he hadn't even paid his bill to the steward.

In the middle of doing this he stopped suddenly and saw that the ship was already under way. He gave a little start, then hailed the hotel porter, and said to him over the rail: "Very well, take my baggage up and keep a room for me all the same."

With that the ship carried him out into the fiord.

This man was Johan Nilsen Nagel.

The hotel porter took away his baggage on a barrow: there was no more than two small trunks and a fur coat—a fur coat in spite of its being the middle of summer—besides a hand-bag and a violin case. None of it bore any mark.

About noon the next day Johan Nagel came driving to the hotel, driving by road with a pair of horses. He might just as well have come by sea, much easier in fact, but still he drove. He had some more baggage with him: on the front seat stood another trunk and beside it lay a travelling-bag, a coat, and a hold-all with a few things in it. The hold-all was marked "J.N.N." in beads.

Before leaving the carriage he asked the landlord about his room, and on being shown up to the first floor he began examining the walls, how thick they were and whether anything could be heard from the adjoining rooms. Then he suddenly asked the chambermaid: "What's your name?"

"Sara."

"Sara." And he went on: "Can I have something to eat? So your name's Sara. Look here," he said again, "has this house been a druggist's some time?"

Sara replied in surprise: "Yes. But that was many years ago."

"I see, many years ago? Well, it struck me all at once when I came into the passage; it was not the smell that told me, but I had a feeling of it all the same. Well, well."

During dinner he did not utter a single word. His fellow passengers of the evening before, the two gentlemen who sat at the end of the table, winked at each other when he came in, made no attempt, indeed, to hide their

amusement at his misfortune; but he did not seem to hear them. He ate quickly, shook his head at the sweets, and left the table suddenly by sliding backwards from his stool. He lit a cigar at once and disappeared down the street.

And now he was out till long past midnight; he came back just before the clock struck three. Where had he been? It appeared later that he had walked back to the nearest town, walked on foot there and back, the whole long road he had driven over in the morning. He must have had some very urgent business. When Sara opened the door to him, he was wet with perspiration; but he gave the girl several smiles and was in the best of humours.

"My goodness, what a lovely neck you have, girl!" he said. "Have any letters come for me while I was out? For Nagel, Johan Nagel? Ugh, three whole telegrams! Oh, look here, do me the kindness to take away that picture there, will you? Then I shan't have it staring me in the face. It'll be such a bore to lie in bed looking at it the whole time. You see, Napoleon III didn't have such a green beard as that. Thanks."

When Sara had gone Nagel stopped in the middle of the room. He stood perfectly still, staring quite absently at a particular spot in the wall, and, except that his head sank more and more to one side, he did not move. This went on a long time.

He was under the middle height and had a brown complexion with strangely dark eyes and a delicate, effeminate mouth. On one finger he wore a plain ring of lead or iron. He was very broad-shouldered and might have been twenty-eight or thirty, not over thirty in any case. His hair was beginning to go grey at the temples.

He awoke from his thoughts with a violent start, so violent that it may have been assumed; just as if he had been studying this start all the time, though he was alone

in the room. Then he took out of his trouser pocket some keys, some loose change, and some kind of a medal for saving life, on a sadly crumpled ribbon; these articles he placed on the table by his bed. Then he put his wallet under the pillow and took from his waistcoat pocket his watch and a bottle, a little medicine bottle marked "Poison." He held the watch in his hand a moment before laying it down, but returned the bottle to his pocket at once. Then he took off his ring and washed himself, smoothing his hair back with his fingers and never using the looking-glass.

When already in bed he suddenly missed his ring, which he had left on the washing-stand, and, as though unable to be separated from this wretched iron ring, he got up and put it on again. Finally he opened the three telegrams, but before he had even read through the first one he burst into a short, quiet laugh. He lay there all alone laughing to himself; he had extraordinarily good teeth. Then his face became serious again and a moment later he pitched the telegrams away with the greatest nonchalance. Yet they seemed to refer to a big and important affair; it was a question of sixty-two thousand crowns for an estate; indeed, there was an offer to pay the whole sum down if the deal were concluded at once. They were brief, dry business telegrams and there was nothing laughable about them; but they were unsigned. A few minutes later Nagel fell asleep. The two candles on the table, which he had forgotten to put out, shone upon his clean-shaven face and his chest and threw their calm light upon the telegrams which lay wide open on the table——

The morning after, Johan Nagel sent to the post office and received a number of newspapers, among them a couple of foreign ones, but no letter. He took his violin case and put it on a chair in the middle of the room, just

as if trying to show it off; but he did not open it and left the instrument untouched.

All he did in the course of the morning was to write one or two letters and to wander up and down his room reading a book. He also bought a pair of gloves in a shop, and afterwards, on going into the market, he paid ten crowns for a little sandy puppy which he immediately presented to the landlord. To everybody's amusement he had named the puppy Jakobsen in spite of its being a bitch.

So he found nothing to do the whole day. He had no business to see to in the town and no visits to make; he did not call at any office and did not know a soul. The people in the hotel were somewhat surprised at his strange indifference to almost everything, even his own affairs. Thus the three telegrams still lay open for everyone to read on the table in his room; he had not touched them since the evening they arrived. And sometimes he would give no answer to a straightforward question. The landlord had twice tried to get out of him who he was and what had brought him to the town, but both times he had avoided answering. One more peculiar thing came to light in the course of the day: although he had not a single acquaintance in the place and had taken no steps to get in touch with anybody, he had nevertheless stopped short in front of one of the local young ladies by the entrance to the churchyard, stopped short and looked at her and bowed very deeply without uttering a word of explanation. The lady in question had blushed all over her face. Thereupon the impudent fellow had walked straight out along the road, as far as the parsonage and beyond—a thing he repeated on the following days. The door of the hotel always had to be opened for him after closing-time, so late did he return from his walks.

Then on the third morning just as Nagel was leaving

his room he ran into the landlord, who said good-morning and spoke a few civil words. They went out into the veranda and both sat down, and it occurred to the landlord to ask a question about the shipment of a case of fresh fish. "How am I to send off that case there, can you tell me?"

Nagel looked at the case, smiled, and shook his head.

"No, I'm not up in these things," he replied.

"No? I thought perhaps you had travelled a lot and seen things and would know how they set about it in other places."

"Oh, no, I haven't travelled much."

Pause.

"Oh, then perhaps you've—well, you've been busy with other things. You're a business man perhaps?"

"No, I'm not a business man."

"Oh, then you're not here on business?"

No answer. Nagel lit a cigar and smoked slowly, looking into space. The landlord watched him from the side.

"Won't you play to us some time? I see you have a violin with you," said the landlord again.

Nagel replied carelessly: "Oh no, I've given it up."

Soon after, he got up and left without ceremony. A moment later he came back and said: "Look here, it just occurred to me: you can give me your bill when you like. It's all the same to me when I pay."

"Thanks," replied the landlord, "there's no hurry. If you make a long stay we'll have to reduce the terms a little. I don't know whether you're thinking of staying some time?"

Nagel suddenly became animated and answered at once; he even blushed slightly for no apparent reason.

"Yes, it's quite likely I may stay here some time," he said. "It depends on circumstances. By the way, perhaps I haven't told you—I'm an agronomist, a farmer;

I've been abroad and now maybe I shall settle here for a while. But perhaps I even forgot to——My name is Nagel, Johan Nilsen Nagel."

With that he shook the landlord's hand very cordially and asked his pardon for not having introduced himself before. There was not a trace of irony to be seen in his features.

"It just struck me that perhaps we might find you a better and quieter room," said the landlord. "You're close to the stairs now and that's not always pleasant."

"Thanks, there's no need for that; the room's first-rate; I'm quite satisfied with it. Besides I can see the whole square from my windows and that amuses me."

After a moment the landlord went on: "So you're going to take a holiday now? At any rate you'll be here for a while, through the summer?"

Nagel replied: "Two or three months, perhaps longer; I don't know for certain. It all depends on circumstances. I'll see what turns up."

At this moment a man went by and bowed to the landlord in passing. He was an insignificant-looking man, short of stature and very poorly clad; he walked with obvious difficulty and yet got along fairly quickly. In reply to his very deep bow the landlord did not even touch his hat; Nagel on the other hand took his velvet cap right off.

The landlord looked at him and said: "That's a man we call Minutten. He's not quite right in the head, but I'm sorry for him, he's an excellent fellow."

That was all that was said about Minutten.

"There's something I saw in the papers a few days ago," Nagel said abruptly, "about a man that was found dead in the woods somewhere about here; what kind of a man was he? Karlsen, I think his name was. Did he come from here?"

"Yes," replied the landlord, "he was the son of a leech woman; you can see her house from here, that red roof over there. He'd only come home for the vacation and then he ended his days while he was about it. But it was a great pity; he was a talented lad and was going into the Church. Oh well, one doesn't quite know what to say about it, but it looks rather suspicious; if the arteries were severed on both his wrists it can scarcely have been an accident, can it? And now they've found the knife, a little penknife with a white handle; the police found it late last night. Presumably there was a love-story at the bottom of it."

"I see. But can there really be any doubt that he killed himself?"

"We hope for the best; that is to say, there are some who think he may have been walking with the knife in his hand and then stumbled so badly that he hurt himself in two places at once. Ha ha, it doesn't sound likely, not very likely. But they're certain to give him consecrated ground. No, he never stumbled, I'm afraid!"

"You say the knife was not found till last night. Wasn't it lying beside him?"

"No, it lay several paces off. After using it he threw it away, farther into the wood; it was a pure accident they found it."

"Oh. But what reason can he have had for throwing the knife away when he lay there with obvious knife wounds? It must have been clear to everybody that he had used a knife?"

"Ah, God knows what his idea may have been; but, as I was saying, there was some love-story mixed up in it. I never heard anything so crazy; the more I think of it, the worse it seems."

"Why do you think there was a love-story mixed up in it?"

"For various reasons. It's not exactly a subject to talk about, though."

"But couldn't he have fallen accidentally? You see, he was lying so awkwardly; wasn't he lying on his stomach with his face in a puddle?"

"Yes, and he'd got himself in a fearful mess. But that doesn't make any difference, he may have done that on purpose too. Perhaps he wanted to hide the death agony on his face in that way. Nobody knows."

"Did he leave anything in writing on him?"

"He seems to have been writing on a piece of paper; but for that matter it was a habit of his to walk along the road writing things. And now they think he used the knife to sharpen his pencil or something and then he tumbled down and got a cut on one wrist just on the artery, then on the other wrist just in the same place, all in the same fall! But sure enough, he did leave something in writing; he was holding a bit of paper in his hand and on it were the words: "Would that thy steel were as sharp as thy final No!"

"What rubbish! Was the knife blunt?"

"Yes, it was blunt."

"Couldn't he have honed it first?"

"It was not his knife."

"Whose knife was it, then?"

The landlord thought for a moment, but then said: "It was Fröken Kielland's knife."

"Was it Fröken Kielland's knife?" asked Nagel. And a moment after he asked again: "Well, and who is Fröken Kielland?"

"Dagny Kielland. She's the daughter of the clergyman."

"I see. That was very strange. I never heard the like! Then was this young man so gone on her?"

"Yes, he must have been. As far as that goes, they're all gone on her, so he wasn't alone in that."

Nagel was lost in thought and said no more. Then the landlord broke the silence by saying: "Well, what I've just been telling you is a secret, so I beg you——"

"I see," replied Nagel. "Well, you can be quite easy."

When Nagel went in to lunch shortly afterwards the landlord was already in the kitchen, announcing that at last he had had a proper chat with the yellow man in No. 7. "He's an agronomist," said the landlord, "and he comes from abroad. He says he will stay several months; God knows what kind of a fellow he is."

II

ON the evening of the same day it came about that Nagel was suddenly brought face to face with Minutten. The result was a tedious and endless conversation between them, a conversation which lasted three whole hours.

The way of it was this, from first to last:

Johan Nagel sat in the hotel café holding a newspaper in his hand when Minutten came in. Several more people were sitting at the tables, among them a stout peasant woman with a black and red knitted shawl over her shoulders. Everybody seemed to know Minutten; he bowed politely to right and left as he came in, but was received with loud shouts and laughter. Even the peasant woman got up and wanted to dance with him.

"Not to-day, not to-day," he said, trying to avoid the woman, and he went straight up to the landlord and addressed him, cap in hand: "I've carried the coals up to the kitchen, so perhaps there's nothing more to-day?"

"No," replied the landlord, "what more should there be?"

"No," said Minutten in turn and meekly withdrew.

His ugliness was quite out of the ordinary. He had calm, blue eyes, but unpleasantly protruding front teeth and an extremely crooked walk on account of a bodily defect. His hair was rather grey; his beard on the other hand was darker, but so thin that his face showed through it everywhere. This man had once been a sailor, but was now living with a relative who had a little coal business

down on the quays. He seldom if ever raised his eyes from the floor when speaking to anyone.

There was a call for him from one of the tables, a gentleman in a grey summer suit was waving frantically to him and pointing to a bottle of beer.

"Come and have a glass of mother's milk. And then I want to see what you look like without your beard," he said.

Respectfully, with bent back and cap still in hand, Minutten approached the table. As he passed Nagel, he gave him a special bow and moved his lips very slightly. He presented himself before the gentleman in grey and whispered: "Not so loud, sir, I beg you. You see there are strangers present."

"But, good Lord," said the young man—he was a magistrate's deputy—"I only wanted to offer you a glass of beer. And then you come and abuse me for talking too loud."

"No, you misunderstand me and I beg your pardon. But when there are strangers present I feel so shy of starting those old tricks again. I can't drink beer either, not now."

"What, you can't? You can't drink beer?"

"No, I thank you, not now."

"So ho, you thank me not now? When do you thank me then? You a parson's son! You ought to take care how you express yourself."

"Oh, you misunderstand me and it's no good."

"Now, now, no nonsense. What's the matter with you?"

The Deputy pulled Minutten into a chair and Minutten sat there a moment, but then got up again.

"No, let me be," he said; "I can't stand drink; I can stand less now than I used to, goodness knows why. I

get drunk and all mixed up before I know what I'm doing."

The Deputy got up, looked fixedly at Minutten, thrust a glass into his hand, and said: "Drink."

Pause. Minutten looked up, pushed the hair off his forehead and remained silent.

"Well, to oblige you; but only a few drops," he said at last. "But only a little, for the honour of drinking your health."

"Drink it off!" cried the Deputy, and had to turn away to keep from laughing.

"No, not right off, not right off. Why should I drink it off if I don't want to? Oh, don't take offence and frown at me for that; I'd rather do it this once if you must have it. I hope it won't go to my head. It's funny, but I can stand so little.—Your health!"

"Off with it!" shouted the Deputy again; "no heel taps! There, that's right. Now we'll sit down and make faces. First you can gnash your teeth a little, then I'll cut your beard off and make you ten years younger. Now then, first you gnash your teeth."

"No, I won't do it, not in the sight of these strangers. You mustn't ask me, I won't do it really," said Minutten, making a move to go. "I haven't time either," said he.

"Haven't time either? That's bad. Ha ha, that's real bad. Not even time?"

"No, not now."

"Now listen: what if I told you that I've thought for a long while of another coat for you than the one you have on.—Let me just see; yes, it's as rotten as can be; look here, it won't stand a touch." And the Deputy found a little hole and pushed his finger through it. "It gives; it won't stand anything; look here; no, will you look here!"

"Let me be! In God's name, what have I done to you? And leave my coat alone!"

"But, bless me, I promise you another coat to-morrow certain; I promise it in the presence of—let me see, one, two, four, seven—in the presence of seven people. What's the matter with you this evening? You flare up and get nasty and want to trample us all under foot. Yes, you do. Just because I finger your coat."

"I beg pardon, I didn't mean to be nasty; you know I'm ready to do you any favour you like, but——"

"Well, then do me the favour to sit down."

Minutten pushed his grey hair off his forehead and sat down.

"Good, and next do me the favour to gnash your teeth a little."

"No, I won't do that."

"So you won't do that, what? Yes or no!"

"Why, good God, what have I done to you? Can't you leave me in peace? Why do you all pick me out to make a fool of? That stranger over there is looking this way; I've noticed him; he's keeping an eye on us and I suppose he's laughing too. That's always the way; the very first day you came here to be deputy Dr. Stenersen got hold of me and taught you to play the fool with me, and now you're teaching that gentleman over there the same. You all learn it one after the other."

"Now, now; yes or no?"

"No, do you hear!" shrieked Minutten, jumping up from his chair. But, as though afraid of his own audacity, he sat down again and added: "I *can't* gnash my teeth either, that's the truth."

"You *can't?* Ha ha, of course you can. You gnash your teeth splendidly."

"God help me if I can!"

"But you've done it before, haven't you?"

"Yes, but then I was drunk, I don't remember it; everything was going round. I was sick for two days afterwards."

"Right," said the Deputy, "you were drunk that time, I admit that. Only why do you blurt it out in the hearing of all these people? That's more than I should have done."

At this point the landlord left the café. Minutten kept silence; the Deputy looked at him and said: "Well, what's it to be? Remember the coat."

"I remember it," answered Minutten, "but I neither will nor can drink any more, so now you know."

"You both will and can! Do you hear what I say? Will and can, I say. If I have to pour it into you——" With these words the Deputy rose with Minutten's glass in his hand. "Now, open your mouth!"

"No, by God in heaven, I won't taste another drop!" cried Minutten, pale with emotion. "And no power on earth shall make me! Yes, you must excuse me, it makes me ill; you don't know what it does to me. Don't be so unkind to me, I beg you sincerely. I would rather—I'd rather gnash my teeth a little without any beer."

"Ah, that's another matter; damn it all, that's quite another matter if you'll do it without any beer."

"Yes, I'd rather do it without any beer."

And in the end, amid roars of laughter from the spectators, Minutten ground his terrible teeth together. Nagel was apparently deep in his paper; he sat quite still in his place by the window.

"Louder, louder!" cried the Deputy; "gnash them louder, we can't hear you."

Minutten sat upright in his chair, holding on stiffly with both hands as though afraid of falling down, and gnashed his teeth till his head quivered. Everybody laughed; the peasant woman laughed till she had to dry

her eyes; she didn't know what to do for laughing and started spitting vacantly across the floor from sheer delight.

"God help me, what a sight!" she screamed, completely prostrated. "Oh, that Deputy!"

"There! I can't do it any louder," said Minutten, "I really can't; God is my witness, it's the truth; I can't do any more."

"No, no, then rest a little and start again. But you've got to gnash your teeth. Then we'll cut off your beard. Now taste your beer; yes, you must, here it is waiting."

Minutten shook his head and said nothing. The Deputy took out his purse and laid a twenty-five öre on the table, saying: "You know, you used to do it for ten, but I don't grudge you twenty-five; I'm raising your wages. Now!"

"Ah, don't tease me any more; I won't do it."

"You won't do it? You refuse?"

"But, good God, stop it now and leave me in peace! I'm not going to humour you any more for the sake of that coat; I'm a man after all. What do you want with me?"

"Now I'll tell you something: as you see, I flick this scrap of cigar ash into your glass; do you see that? And I take this insignificant match here and this trifling match here and drop these two matches into the selfsame glass while you look on—there! And now I assure you that you are going to drink your glass right to the bottom all the same. Yes, you shall."

Minutten jumped up. He was trembling visibly, his grey hair had fallen over his forehead again, and he stared the Deputy straight in the face. This went on for a few seconds.

"No, that's too much, that's too much!" even the peas-

ant woman cried. "Don't do it! God save me from the likes of you!"

"So you won't? You refuse?" said the Deputy; he too rose to his feet.

Minutten made an effort to speak, but could not get a word out. Everybody was looking at him.

Then suddenly Nagel got up from his table by the window, put down his paper, and walked across the room, without hurrying and without noise, but still he attracted the attention of all. He stopped by Minutten, laid his hand on his shoulder, and said in a loud, clear voice: "If you will take your glass and throw it over the head of that puppy there I'll give you ten crowns down and protect you from all the consequences." He pointed straight at the Deputy's face and repeated: "I mean that puppy there."

At once there was dead silence. Minutten looked in terror from one to the other, saying: "But—no, but——?" He got no farther, but repeated this over and over again with quaking voice, as though it were a question. No one else said anything. The Deputy stepped back in confusion and found his chair; he had turned perfectly white in the face and did not say a word. His mouth was open.

"I repeat," Nagel went on, slowly and distinctly, "I will give you ten crowns to throw your glass at that puppy's head. I have the money here in my hand. You need not be afraid of the consequences either." And Nagel actually held out a ten-crown note and let Minutten see it.

But Minutten behaved in an odd way. He made off all at once to a corner of the café, ran in his short, crooked steps to this corner, and sat down there without answering. He sat with drooping head and threw sidelong looks about him and several times drew up his knees as though in fear.

Then the door opened and the landlord came back. He began pottering with his own things on the counter and did not notice what was going on around him until the Deputy suddenly jumped up and faced Nagel with both arms in the air and a hoarse cry of rage, when the landlord looked around and asked: "What in the world——?"

But nobody answered. The Deputy twice hit out wildly, but each time he came against Nagel's fists. He made no way. His failure irritated him and he beat the air foolishly, as though trying to keep off a world of things; finally he sidled off among the tables, stumbled over a stool, and fell on his knees. He was puffing loudly; his whole figure was transformed by rage; to make things worse he had knocked his arms black and blue against those two sharp fists that met him wherever he aimed his blows. The café was now in a state of confusion; the peasant woman and her companions fled to the door while the others all shouted at once and tried to intervene. At length the Deputy got on his feet again and went for Nagel, stopped and shouted at him with his hands stretched right out, shouted in ridiculous desperation at not finding words: "You damned—Devil scorch you—you bounder!"

Nagel looked at him and smiled, went up to the table, picked up the Deputy's hat and handed it to him with a bow. The Deputy snatched his hat and was going to fling it back in his rage, but thought better of it and put it on his head with a smack. Then he turned and went out. Two big dents showed in his hat and gave him a comic look.

Now the landlord came forward and demanded an explanation. He addressed himself to Nagel, grabbed him by the arm, and said: "What's been happening here? What's the meaning of this?"

Nagel answered: "Oh, won't you leave off pinching my arm? I'm not going to run away. For that matter nothing is happening here; I insulted the man who has just gone out and he wanted to defend himself. There's nothing to be said to that; it's all in order."

But the landlord got angry and stamped on the floor.

"No rows!" he cried. "I won't have it! If you want to make a shindy, you must go into the street; I won't have that sort of thing in here. People seem to be crazy!"

"Yes, that's all right," interrupted one or two of the customers, "but we saw the whole thing." And with the instinct of the crowd to side with the victor of the moment they took Nagel's part implicitly and explained the whole facts of the case.

Nagel himself shrugged his shoulders and went up to Minutten. Without any preliminaries he asked the little grey-haired buffoon: "What have you to do with that deputy that he can treat you as he does?"

"Don't tell!" answered Minutten. "I have nothing at all to do with him, he's a stranger to me. I have only danced for him once in the square, for ten öre. But he's always playing jokes with me."

"So you dance for people and get paid for it?"

"Yes, now and then. But not often, only when I need these ten öre and can't get them any other way."

"What do you spend the money on?"

"I have lots of things to spend money on. In the first place I'm a stupid man; I haven't any gifts and I'm not well off. When I was a sailor and supported myself, it was better in every way; but then I had an accident, I fell from the rigging and got ruptured, and since then I haven't been able to manage very well. I get my food and all I need from my uncle; I live with him too and am quite comfortable, yes, plenty of everything, for my uncle has a coal business which brings him in a living.

But I contribute a little myself, especially now in the summer-time, when we scarcely sell any coal. That's as true as I'm sitting here talking to you. There's some days when ten öre comes in handy; I always buy something with it and take it home. But as for the Deputy, it amuses him to see me dance just because I'm ruptured and can't dance properly."

"Then is it your uncle's wish that you should dance in the square for money?"

"No, no, it's not; you mustn't think that on any account. He often says: 'Away with this clown's pay!' Yes, he often calls it clown's pay when I come with my ten öre, and he scolds me for letting people make game of me."

"Well, that was the first thing. Now the second?"

"What do you say?"

"Now the second thing?"

"I don't understand."

"You said that *in the first place* you were a stupid man; well, what in the second place?"

"If I said that I ask your pardon."

"So you're only stupid?"

"I sincerely beg you to excuse me,"

"Was your father a clergyman?"

"Yes, my father was a clergyman."

Pause.

"Look here," said Nagel; "if you can spare the time let us go up to my room for a bit, will you? Do you smoke? Good! Well, come along; my room's upstairs. I shall be very grateful if you will pay me a visit."

To everybody's great surprise Nagel and Minutten went up to the first floor, where they spent the whole evening together.

III

MINUTTEN found a chair and lit a cigar.

"Don't you drink anything?" asked Nagel.

"No, I don't drink much; I get fuddled and see double in a very short time," answered his guest.

"Have you ever drunk champagne? Yes, of course you have?"

"Yes, many years ago, at my father's and mother's silver wedding, then I drank champagne."

"Was it good?"

"Yes, I remember that it tasted good."

Nagel rang and had champagne brought.

While they were sipping at their glasses and smoking, Nagel said suddenly, looking fixedly at Minutten: "Tell me—well, it's only a question I put and perhaps it will strike you as ridiculous; but could you for a certain sum allow yourself to be registered as the father of a child that was not yours? It just occurs to me."

Minutten looked at him with staring eyes and said nothing.

"For a smallish sum, fifty crowns, or let us say up to a couple of hundred crowns?" asked Nagel. "It isn't so much a question of the amount."

Minutten shook his head and was silent for a long while.

"No," he said at last.

"Couldn't you? I'd let you have the money down."

"It's no use. No, I can't do it; I can't oblige you in this."

"Why not, exactly?"

"Don't ask me; let me be. I am a man."

"Well, perhaps that was coming it rather strong; why should you do anyone a service of that sort? But I should like to ask you another question: are you willing —could you for five crowns go round the town with a newspaper or a paper bag fastened to your back, starting from the hotel here and passing through the square and along the quays—could you do that? And for five crowns?"

Minutten bowed his head shamefacedly and repeated mechanically: "Five crowns." Otherwise he made no reply.

"Oh well, or ten crowns if you like; let us say ten crowns. So you could do it for ten crowns?"

Minutten pushed the hair off his forehead.

"I can't make out why everybody that comes here sees at once that I'm a butt," he said.

"As you see, I can hand you the money straight away," Nagel went on; "it only depends on yourself."

Minutten fixed his eyes on the note with a forlorn look, licked his lips over the money, and burst out: "Well, I——"

"Excuse me!" said Nagel rapidly; "excuse me for interrupting you," he said again to prevent the other's speaking. "What is your name? I don't know, I don't think you have told me your name?"

"My name is Grögaard."

"Grögaard. Are you related to the Eidsvold man?" *

"Yes, such as I am."

"What were we talking about? Oh, Grögaard. Well, that being so, of course you don't agree to earn these ten crowns in this way?"

"No," murmured Minutten, wavering.

* That is, one of those who drew up the Norwegian Constitution at Eidsvold in 1814.—Tr.

"Now listen to me," said Nagel, speaking very slowly. "I will gladly give you this ten-crown note because you will *not* do what I proposed. And besides that I will give you another ten crowns if you will do me the pleasure of accepting it. Don't jump up; this little present doesn't inconvenience me; I have lots of money now, quite a lot of money; it won't cause me any embarrassment."—As he put down the notes, Nagel added: "You will be doing me a pleasure. Pray take them."

But now Minutten was dumb; his good fortune had gone to his head and he began to struggle with his tears. He blinked his eyes and swallowed.

Nagel said: "Your age is about forty or so?"

"Three and forty; I am over three and forty."

"Now put the money in your pocket. You're welcome to it.—What's the name of that deputy we were talking to in the café?"

"I don't know; we just call him the deputy. He's deputy in the Magistrate's office."

"Well, that's all the same. Tell me——"

"Excuse me!"—Minutten could contain himself no longer; he was overwhelmed and simply had to explain, though he stammered like a child. "Excuse me and forgive me!" he said, and for a long while he could not get any more out.

"What was it you wanted to say?"

"Thanks, sincere thanks from a sincere——"

Pause.

"We've done with that."

"No, wait a bit!" cried Minutten. "Excuse me, but we've not done with it. You thought I *wouldn't* do it, that it was obstinacy on my part and that I delighted in sticking out against you; but as true as there's a God ——Can you say that we've done with it when perhaps you've even got the idea that I was haggling over the

price and wouldn't do it for five crowns? That was all I wanted to say."

"Well, that's all right. A man with your name and your bringing-up mustn't play such fool's tricks. It occurred to me—of course you know all the ins and outs of the town, don't you? I must tell you, I'm thinking of staying here for a time, really settling down here for a few months this summer; what do you think of that? Do you belong here?"

"Yes, I was born here; my father was clergyman here, and I've lived here the last thirteen years, since I've been crippled."

"Do you carry coals?"

"Yes, I deliver coal to people's houses. It doesn't do me any harm, if that's why you ask. I'm used to it and it doesn't hurt me if I'm careful of the stairs. But last winter I had a fall and made myself worse, so that I had to use a stick a long time."

"Did you really? How did that happen?"

"Oh, it was at the bank and there was a little ice on the steps. I was coming up with a pretty heavy sack. When I was about half-way I saw Consul Andresen up above, just starting to come down. I was going to turn round and go down again so as to let the Consul pass; he didn't tell me to, but it was natural and I'd have done it without asking; only just then I was so unfortunate as to slip on the stair and fall. I came down on my right shoulder. 'How do you feel?' says the Consul to me; 'you didn't cry out, so you haven't hurt yourself, have you?' 'No,' I answered, 'I was rather lucky.' But five minutes hadn't gone by before I fainted twice running; and besides that I swelled up in the belly from my old trouble. But I must say the Consul was very generous to me afterwards, though he was not to blame."

"Was that all the damage? Didn't you hurt your head?"

"Oh yes, I hurt my head a little. And I was spitting blood too for a while."

"And the Consul helped you all the time you were ill?"

"Yes, grandly. He sent me all kinds of things, he never forgot me. But the best of all was the day I was up again and went to thank him, and the Consul had already had the flag hoisted. He had expressly given orders to hoist the flag simply in my honour, though it was also Fröken Fredrikke's birthday."

"Who is Fröken Fredrikke?"

"She's his daughter."

"Oh. Yes, that was nice of him—Oh, I say, you don't happen to know what the flags were for a few days ago?"

"A few days ago? Let me see, was it a week or more ago? Then it was for Fröken Kielland's engagement, Dagny Kielland's engagement. Oh, they get engaged and married and leave the place one after another. I've watched them playing and going to school and getting confirmed and growing up, all of them. Dagny was only three and twenty and she was the favourite of the whole town. She was pretty too. She got engaged to Lieutenant Hansen, who gave me this very cap that you see. He belongs here too."

"Has this Fröken Kielland fair hair?"

"Yes, she has fair hair. She is uncommonly handsome and everybody was fond of her."

"I believe I must have seen her by the parsonage. Does she usually carry a red parasol?"

"That's right! And there isn't another red parasol in the place, as far as I know. You've seen her if you've seen a lady with a thick flaxen plait down her back. She is not like anybody else hereabouts. But perhaps you haven't spoken to her yet?"

"Yes, perhaps I have spoken to her too."—And Nagel added thoughtfully to himself: "Was *that* Fröken Kielland?"

"Ah, but not properly; perhaps you haven't had a long talk with her? That's something you can look forward to. She laughs aloud when anything amuses her, and often she will laugh at almost nothing, she is so gay. If you talk to her, you'll see how she listens attentively to what you say until you have quite finished, and then she answers. But when she answers you, her cheeks will often flush. That's how it is, the blood rushes to her head; I've often noticed it when she's been talking to people; it makes her very pretty. But with me it's different; she chats with me just as it may chance and makes no ceremony. I might go up to her in the street and she would stop and give me her hand, even if she was in a hurry. If you don't believe it you can just see one day."

"I'm quite willing to believe it. So you have a good friend in Fröken Kielland?"

"Meaning of course that she always puts up with me. That's all that's to be expected. Now and then I'm at the parsonage when I'm invited, and as far as I can see, I've not been unwelcome even when I've gone there uninvited. And Fröken Dagny lent me books when I was ill; ay, she came here herself with them, carried them all the way under her arm."

"What sort of books might they have been?"

"You mean, what sort of books they might be that I could read and understand?"

"This time you misunderstand me. Your question shows penetration, but you misunderstand me. You are an interesting man. I meant, what kind of books are they that this young lady herself owns and reads? I should be glad to know that."

"I remember she once brought me Garborg's *Peasant*

Students and two more; one of them must have been Turgenev's *Rudin*. And another time she read aloud to me from Garborg's *Irreconcilables*." *

"And were they her own books?"

"Well, they were her father's. It was her father's name that was in them."

"By the way, that time you went to Consul Andresen's to thank him, as you were telling me——"

"Yes, I wanted to thank him for his help."

"Just so. But was the flag hoisted already *before* you arrived that day?"

"Yes, he had had it hoisted for my sake. He told me so himself."

"There, you see. But mightn't it have been on account of the birthday that the flag was flying?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose it was. It's quite likely; that's another reason. It would have been a shame not to hoist the flag on Fröken Fredrikke's birthday."

"There you're right again.—To go from one thing to another—your uncle, how old is he?"

"He must be about seventy. No, perhaps that's too much, but at any rate he's over sixty. He's very old, but active for his age. He can still read without glasses at a pinch."

"What is his name?"

"His name's Grögaard too. We're both called Grögaard."

"Has your uncle a house of his own, or does he rent one?"

"He rents the room we live in, but the coal shed he owns himself. We have no difficulty in paying the rent, if that's what you're thinking of. We pay in coal, and

* Garborg is the chief prose writer of the *Landsmaal* school in Norway. To read him in the nineties would show a leaning to nationalism in politics and free thought in religion.—Tr.

sometimes I can pay off a little with some job of work."

"I suppose your uncle doesn't carry coals?"

"No, that's my work. He measures it out and looks after it all and I do the carrying. You see, I can get about better because I'm stronger."

"Of course. And then you have a woman to do your cooking."

Pause.

"Excuse me," Minutten replied; "don't be annoyed, but I'm quite ready to go if you wish it. Perhaps you're keeping me here out of kindness, though you can't have any pleasure in hearing about my affairs. Or maybe you're talking to me for some reason or other that I don't understand, and if that's so, it's all right. But if I go now, there's nobody that will interfere with me, you needn't think that. To tell the truth, I don't meet any ill-disposed persons. The Deputy won't be waiting for me outside the door to take revenge, if that's what you're afraid of. And even if he was there, he wouldn't do me any harm; I think not."

"You will do me a pleasure by staying; but you must not feel under an obligation to tell me things because I have given you a couple of crowns for tobacco. Do as you please."

"I'll stay, I'll stay!" cried Minutten; "God bless you!" he cried. "I'm glad you should get some entertainment out of me, though I'm ashamed not only of myself but of sitting here in these clothes. I could have found something more decent if I'd had a little time to get ready. It's one of Uncle's old coats I have on and it won't stand anything; I assure you, it won't bear a touch. And here's a great tear the Deputy's given me; I hope you'll excuse it.—No, as to having a woman to cook for us, we have nothing of the sort. We do all our own cooking and washing. It's no great trouble, for, you see, we don't

do more than we can help. If we make coffee in the morning, for instance, we drink what's left in the evening without warming it up, and the same with our dinner; you might say we cook it once for all when we get a chance. What more can we ask in our position? And then I have the washing for my share. It helps to pass the time for me, too, when I've nothing else to do."

A bell rang below and people could be heard going downstairs to supper.

"There's the supper bell," said Minutten.

"Yes," replied Nagel. But he did not get up, nor did he show any sign of impatience; on the contrary, he sat back in his chair and asked: "Then perhaps you knew this Karlsen who was found dead in the woods the other day? A sad affair, wasn't it?"

"Yes, an extremely sad affair. Oh yes, I should think I did know him—a splendid fellow and a noble character. Do you know what he said to me once? He sent for me early one Sunday morning; it's over a year ago now; it was in May last year. He asked me to take a letter for him.—'Yes,' I said, 'I'll do that; but the shoes I have on to-day are not fit to be seen, I can't very well go to anybody in these shoes. If you'll let me, I'll go home and borrow another pair.'—'No, there's no need for that,' he answered; 'I'm sure it doesn't matter, unless you'll get wet in those.'—He even thought of that—that I might get wet in those shoes! Well, so then he slipped a crown into my hand and gave me the letter. When I was going out, he pulled the door open again and came after me; his whole face was beaming so that I stopped to look at him, and his eyes were full of tears. Then he took me in his arms; he came quite close to me and actually took me round the waist and said: 'Take the letter now, old friend; I shall remember you later. When I am ordained and have a living, you shall come and stay with me all the time.

Well, go now and good luck to you!'—Ah, he never got a living, sad to say; but he would have kept his word to me if he had lived."

"And so you took the letter?"

"Yes."

"And was Fröken Kielland glad to get it?"

"How can you tell it was to Fröken Kielland?"

"How can I tell? Why, you just told me yourself."

"I told you myself? That's not true."

"Not true? He he—do you think I'm telling you a lie?"

"No, excuse me, I dare say you're right; but anyhow I ought not to have said it. It was careless of me. No, did I really say it?"

"Why not? Did he forbid you to say it?"

"No, *he* didn't."

"But she?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's all right; it will be safe with me. But can you understand why he went and died just now?"

"No, I can't. But accidents will happen."

"Do you know when he is to be buried?"

"To-morrow midday."

No more was said on that subject. For a while neither of them said anything. Sara put her head in at the door and announced that supper was ready. A moment after Nagel said: "So now Fröken Kielland is engaged. What does her *fiancé* look like?"

"He's Lieutenant Hansen, a gallant and excellent man. Oh, she'll never lack anything with him."

"Is he rich?"

"Yes, his father is very rich."

"Is he a merchant?"

"No, he's a shipowner. He lives two or three doors from here. It isn't a very big house though, but he

doesn't want anything bigger; when the son is away, there are only the two old people at home. They have a daughter too, but she is married in England."

"And how much is old Hansen worth, do you think?"

"Perhaps he's worth a million. Nobody knows."

Pause.

"Ay," said Nagel, "wealth is badly distributed in this world. What if you had a little of his money, Grögaard?"

"God bless you, no, why should I? We must be content with what we have."

"So they say.—Now it just occurs to me to ask you something: I suppose you can't have much time for other work when you have to carry all these coals? No, I can understand that. But I heard you ask the landlord whether he had anything more for you to do to-day?"

"No," answered Minutten, shaking his head.

"It was down in the café. You said you had carried the coals into the kitchen, and then was there nothing more for you to-day, you asked."

"That was for another reason. Did you notice it? No, the fact is I hoped to be paid for the coal there and then, but I didn't like to ask for it straight out. That was all it was. We were in difficulties just now and had set our hopes on being paid."

"How much might you want to get you out of this difficulty?" asked Nagel.

"Lord save you!" cried Minutten in a loud voice. "Don't say another word; you've helped us more than enough already. The whole thing amounted to six crowns and here am I with your twenty crowns in my pocket, God reward you for it! But it's quite true we owed these six crowns; our tradesman was to have them for potatoes and other things. He had sent us a bill and we both thought a lot about it and wondered what we were going to do. But now that trouble's over, we can go to sleep

cheerfully and wake up to-morrow and be happy again."

Pause.

"Well, well, perhaps we'd better finish our drinks and say good-night," said Nagel, getting up. "Your health! Now I hope this is not the last time we shall meet. You must really promise to come again; I'm in No. 7, you see. Thanks, thanks for your company!"

Nagel said this with an air of perfect sincerity and shook Minutten's hand. He saw his guest downstairs and went with him to the street door, where he took off his velvet cap, as he had done once before, bowing low.

Minutten took his leave, with countless bows as he went backwards up the street. But he did not get a word out, though he was making efforts all the time to say something.

When Nagel entered the dining-room, he was needlessly polite in his excuses to Sara for being late for supper.

IV

JOHAN NAGEL was awakened in the morning by Sara's knocking and bringing him his papers. He looked through them casually and threw them on the floor as he finished them. A telegram saying that Gladstone had kept his bed two days with a cold, but was now up again, he read twice through and then burst out laughing. After that he crossed his arms behind his head and fell into the following train of thought, while every now and then he talked to himself aloud:

It is dangerous to walk through a wood with a penknife open in your hand. How easy it would be to stumble so awkwardly that the blade would close not only on one but on both your wrists. Remember what happened to Karlsen.—For that matter it's dangerous to go about with a little medicine phial in your waistcoat pocket. You might fall down on the road, break the phial, splinters of glass would penetrate your body and the poison get into your blood. No road is without its danger. What then? But there is one road without a fall—the road on which Gladstone goes. I can see the air of orderly circumspection with which Gladstone walks along a road, how he avoids making a false step, how Providence and himself unite in protecting him. And now his cold has passed off. Gladstone will live till he dies a natural death from well-being.

Pastor Karlsen, why did you burrow your face in a puddle? Shall we leave it an open question whether it was in order to hide your death grimaces or whether your convulsions forced you to it? Anyhow you chose your

time like a child afraid of the dark—bright daylight, the middle of the day—and you held a farewell in your hand. Little Karlsen, little Karlsen!

And why did you choose the wood for your brilliant little enterprise? Did you know that wood, and did it mean more to you than a field, a road, or a lake? The little boy walked there the livelong day, la la la la. Take for instance the Vardal woods, on the way up from Gjövik. Lie there dosing and losing yourself, staring up in the air, looking slap into heaven, so that you can almost find out what gossip they're talking about yourself up there: "That fellow there," says your sainted mamma, "no, if he's coming here, I shall clear out," and makes a cabinet question of it. "He he," I answer and say: "Pst, don't let me disturb you, pray don't let me disturb you!" And I say this loud enough to attract the general attention of a couple of she-angels, the esteemed daughter of Jairus and Svava Björnson.*

What the devil am I laughing at now? Is it supposed to show my superiority? Only children should be allowed to laugh, children and really young girls, nobody else. Laughter is a rudiment from our monkey days, a revolting and shameless sound from the wrong side of the throat. It is expelled from some part of my body when anyone tickles me under the chin. What did Hauge, the butcher, say to me one day, Hauge who had a powerful laugh of his own and knew how to make it tell? He said that nobody in his senses——

Ah, what a charming child he had! The day I met her in the street it was raining; she had a pail in her hand and had lost her money for the steam kitchen; she was crying. Sainted Mamma, did you see from your heaven that I hadn't a single farthing to cheer the child with?

* Svava is the name of the heroine of Björnson's problem play *A Gauntlet*.—Tr.

that I tore my hair in the street and didn't possess an öre? Then the band came past; the pretty Salvation lassie turned round once and gave me a bright look; then she went quietly home, hanging her head, presumably mourning over the bright look she had given me. But just then a man with a long beard, in a soft felt hat, grabbed me by the arm, or I should have been run over. Yes, by Jove, I should.—

Hush! One—two—three; how slowly it strikes! Four—five—six—seven—eight; is it eight already? Nine—ten. Already ten o'clock! Then I must get up. Where was that clock striking? it couldn't have been in the café, could it? Well, it's all the same, all the same, all the same. But wasn't that quite a funny scene in the café last night? Minutten was trembling, I came in the nick of time. It would certainly have ended in his drinking his beer with the cigar ash and matches in it. What then? you interfering rowdy, permit me to ask you, what then? Why do I meddle with other people's affairs? Why have I come to this town at all? Was it brought about by some cataclysm of the universe? by Gladstone's cold, for instance? God help you, child, if you told the honest truth: that you were really on your way home, but all at once you were so strongly moved by the sight of this town—small and wretched as it is—that you nearly wept with a strange and mysterious joy on seeing all the flags flying. By the way, it was the 12th of June; it was for Fröken Kielland's engagement the flags were flying. And two days later I met herself.

Why should I meet her just on that evening, when I was in a shattered state and didn't know what I was doing? When I think of it all again, I'm as ashamed of myself as a dog: "Good-evening, Fröken! I'm a stranger, forgive me, I am out for a walk and don't know where I have got to."

Minutten is right; she blushes at once, and when she answers, she blushes even more.

"Well, where do you want to go?" she says, taking my measure with her eyes.

I take my cap in my hand and stand bare-headed, and while I stand there cap in hand, I take it into my head to say: "Be so kind as to tell me how far it is to town, the exact distance."

"I don't know," she says; "not from here. But the first house you come to is the parsonage and from there it's a mile and a half to town." Having said this she turns to go without more words.

"Many thanks," say I, "but if the parsonage is on the other side of this wood, permit me to accompany you, if you are going there, or even farther. The sun has gone in; let me carry your parasol. I shan't worry you; I won't even talk if you don't want me to; only let me walk by your side and listen to the birds singing. No, don't go, don't go all at once! Why do you run away?"

But as she still ran and wouldn't listen to me, I ran after her to make her hear my excuse: "Deuce take your fair face if it hasn't made the strongest impression on me!"

But now she ran so wildly that in a couple of minutes she was out of sight. She just held her heavy blond plait in her hand as she ran. I never saw anything like it.

That was how it happened. I wasn't going to molest her, I had no bad intentions; I'm ready to bet she's fond of her lieutenant; it never occurred to me to force myself upon her in that way. But that's all right; the whole thing's all right; perhaps her lieutenant will challenge me; he'll join the Deputy, the Magistrate's Deputy, and challenge me.—

By the by, I'd like to know whether that Deputy will give Minutten a new coat. We can wait a day, we can

wait two days perhaps, but if he hasn't done it within two days, we'll remind him about it. Full stop. Nagel.

I know of a poor woman here; she gives me such shamefaced looks as though she wanted to ask for something, but could not bring herself to do it. I'm quite possessed by her eyes, although her hair is white; four times I've gone out of my way to avoid meeting her. She is not old; it is not age that makes her white; her eyelashes are fearfully black still, terribly black; they give a smouldering look to her eyes. She nearly always carries a basket under her apron and it must be that she's ashamed of. When she has gone past, I turn round and see her go down to the market and take a few eggs out of her basket, and these two or three eggs she sells to anyone who will buy and then goes home again with the basket under her apron as before. She lives in a tiny little house down by the quay; the house has only one storey and is not painted. Once I saw her through the window; there were no curtains to it; I only saw some white flowers there, and she stood far back in the room and stared at me as I went past. God knows what sort of a woman she is; but her hand are quite small. I dare say I might give you charity, my white maid, but I would rather give you help.

For that matter I know quite well why your eyes have such hold on me; I knew it at once. It is strange how a youthful love-affair can cling to one so long and crop up again at odd times. But *her* dear face you have not and you are much older than she. Alas, but she married a telegraph clerk after all and went to live at Cable Bay! Well, everyone to his taste; I couldn't expect her love and didn't get it either. There's no help for that.—There, it's striking half-past ten.—No, there's none, there's no help for that. But if you only knew how devotedly I have remembered you for ten or twelve years and never forgotten you—— But that's my own fault, isn't it? she can't help

that. While other people remember for one year and there's an end of it, I go and remember for ten.

I'll give the white egg-woman some help, yes, charity and help both, for the sake of her eyes. Here I have untold wealth to draw upon, sixty-two thousand crowns for an estate, and cash down too. Ho-ho, I need only cast a glance at the table and I see before my eyes three telegraphic documents of the highest value.—Ah, what a trick and what a stroke! One is an agronomist and a capitalist; one does not close right away with the first offer; one sleeps on it and thinks it over. That's what one does, one thinks it over. And meanwhile not a soul boggles at it, though one has purposely made the trick as bald and the stroke as plain as anybody could. Man, thy name is donkey! One can lead you by your donkey's nose wherever one pleases.

There, for instance, there's the neck of a little bottle sticking out of my waistcoat pocket over there. It's medicine, it's prussic acid; I keep it for the sake of curiosity and haven't the courage to use it. Why do I carry it and why did I get it? Humbug again, nothing but humbug, modern decadent humbug, self-advertisement and snobbery. Fie upon it.—White and fine is she as china; she's my morbid Melesina.—

Or take such an innocent thing as my life-saving medal. I earned it honestly, as they call it; one dabbles in all sorts of things; one saves people's lives. But God knows whether I really deserved anything for it. Judge for yourselves, ladies and gentlemen. There's a young man standing by the ship's rail; he is in tears; his shoulders quake; when I speak to him, he gives me a distracted look and suddenly shoots down into the saloon. I follow; the man has already turned in. I examine the passenger list, find the man's name, and see that he is going to Hamburg. That's the first evening. From now on I keep an eye on

him; I surprise him in unexpected places and look him in the face. Why do I do this? Ladies and gentlemen, judge for yourselves! I see him in tears; something is tormenting him cruelly and he often stares into the deep with rapt and crazy looks. What concern is it of mine? None at all, of course, and therefore judge for yourselves, don't be afraid! A couple of days go by; we have a head wind and heavy seas. At night, two o'clock, he comes aft; I am hiding there ready and watch him; the moon gives his face a yellow look. What then? He turns this way and that, flings up his arms and jumps overboard, feet foremost. Yet he is not able to restrain a cry. Did he regret his resolve? Was he afraid at the last moment? If not, why did he cry out? Ladies and gentlemen, what would you have done in my place? I leave it entirely to you. Perhaps you would have respected the sincere, though slightly flinching courage of an unfortunate man and lain still in your hiding-place; I, on the other hand, send a roar up to the captain on the bridge and go overboard myself, and from sheer precipitancy I even go head first. I splash about like a madman; I churn up the water in all directions and I hear them shouting on board in voices of thunder. Then suddenly I hit against one of his arms, extended and stiff, with outspread fingers. His legs are struggling a little. Good; I take him by the neck; he gets heavier and heavier; he gives up struggling and doesn't kick any more; finally he actually tries to wrench himself free. I sprawl around with him, the sea runs high and knocks our foreheads together and I begin to lose consciousness. What was I to do? I gnash my teeth and curse at the top of my voice and I keep a steady hold of the fellow's neck all the time till at last the boat arrives. What would you have done? I saved him like a rough and ruthless bear, and what then? Well, haven't I already left it to you, ladies and gentlemen, to be my

judges? You must give an unsparing judgment, what does it matter to me? But suppose, I say, that it was of the highest importance to the man to avoid arriving at Hamburg? There's the rub! Perhaps he was to meet somebody he didn't want to meet. But the medal, that's a medal for a meritorious act and I carry it in my pocket; I am far from casting it before swine. That too is for your judgment; judge away, what the hell has it to do with me? The whole business concerns me so little that I don't even remember the unfortunate man's name, though no doubt he's alive at this very day. Why did he do it? Perhaps out of hopeless love, perhaps there was really a woman in the case, I don't know; but anyhow it's all the same to me. Enough!—

Ah, these women, these women. There, for instance, we have Kamma, little Danish Kamma. God keep you! Tender as a little dove, quite sick with tenderness, and full of devotion besides, but still capable of coaxing one's last farthing out of one, ay, fleecing one to beggary, simply by laying her artful head on one side and whispering: "Simonsen, darling Simonsen!" Well, God be with you, Kamma; you were full of devotion; now you can go to blazes for me; we are quits.—And now I'll get up.—

No, that's a kind to fight shy of. My son, beware of women's favour, says a great writer—or whatever it is a great writer says. Karlsen was a weak man, an idealist who met his death through his deep feelings; that is, through his weak nerves; that is, again, through want of a nourishing diet and outdoor occupation—he he, and outdoor occupation. "Would thy steel were as sharp as thy final No!" He spoilt his whole posthumous fame by quoting a poet. Suppose I had met Karlsen in good time, on his last day if you like, but anyhow half an hour before the catastrophe, and he had told me that he would quote somebody in his hour of death, then I should

have said something like this: "Look at me, I'm in my right senses; I am interested on behalf of humanity in your not soiling your last hour with a quotation from some great poet or other. Do you know what a great poet is? Well, a great poet is a person who has no shame, who positively does not blush. Other fools have moments when they go red with shame of themselves, with nobody looking on; but not so the great poet. Look at me again: if you want to quote anyone then quote a geographer and don't give yourself away. Victor Hugo—have you a sense of humour? Baron Lesdain was talking one day to Victor Hugo. In the course of conversation the wily Baron Lesdain asked: 'Who is in your opinion the greatest French poet?'—Victor Hugo grinned and bit his lip and said at last: 'Alfred de Musset is the second greatest.' But perhaps you haven't a sense of humour? Do you know what Victor Hugo did in 1870? He wrote a proclamation to the earth's inhabitants in which he strictly forbade the German troops to besiege and bombard Paris. "I have grandsons and other relations here, I don't wish to see them hit by shells,' said Victor Hugo."

Now look here, I haven't any shoes yet. Where's Sara got to with the shoes? Nearly eleven o'clock and she hasn't yet brought my shoes.

So we'll quote a geographer.—

She has a lovely figure, by the way, that Sara. Her hips quiver as she walks; it's just like the quarters of a spanking well-fed mare. Perfectly splendid. I'd like to know if she's ever been married. At any rate she doesn't squeal very much if you give her a dig in the side and she's probably up to anything.—No, I've seen one marriage in my lifetime, been present at it too, so to speak. H'm. Ladies and gentlemen, it was a Sunday evening at a railway station in Sweden, at Kungsbacka railway station. Let me beg you to bear in mind that it was a Sunday

evening. She had big, white hands; he had a brand-new cadet's uniform and no hair on his face; he was as young as that. They travelled together from Gothenburg, and she was young too; they were just children, both of them. I sat watching them from behind my paper; my being there made them perfectly helpless, they looked at each other the whole time. The girl's eyes were bright and she couldn't sit still. Suddenly the train whistled for Kungsbacka; he got hold of her hand, they understood each other, and as soon as the train stopped, they both jumped out in a hurry. She runs off to *"För qvinnor";* he strides after her, straight after her—my goodness, he's made a mistake; he goes into *"För qvinnor"* too! And they shut the door quickly behind them. At that moment the church bells start ringing in the town, because it was Sunday evening. With a full peal of bells they stayed in there; three minutes, four minutes, five minutes go by; what's become of them? They are there still and the bells ring on; God Almighty knows if they won't miss the train! Then at last he opens the door and looks out. He is bareheaded; she is just behind him and puts his cap on, and he turns round and smiles at her. He makes a jump down the steps, she comes after him, still fumbling with her dress, and they reached the train and took their places without a soul's noticing them; no, not a soul except myself. The girl's eyes were perfectly golden when she looked at me and smiled, but her little bosom was leaping violently up and down, up and down. A few minutes after, they were both asleep; they went off right away, so lovely and tired they were.

What do you think of that? Ladies and gentlemen, my tale is ended. I pass by the excellent lady over there, the one with the lorgnette and the masculine stand-up collar, I mean the one with the blue stockings; I address myself to those two or three among you who do not pass your

lives with clenched teeth and social work. Excuse me if I have offended anybody's feelings; I apologize in particular to the lady with the lorgnette and the blue stockings. There, now she's getting up! My word, she'll either clear out or quote somebody. And if she quotes somebody, she means to refute me. And if she means to refute me, she will say something of this sort: "H'm!" she will say, "this gentleman has the coarsest male idea of life that I have yet heard. Is *that* life? I do not know whether the gentleman is totally ignorant of what one of the world's greatest thinkers has said of life? 'Life is a warring with goblins in the vaults of the heart and the brain,' he says."—

Life is a warring with goblins, yes. In the vaults of the heart and the brain. That's right. Ladies and gentlemen, the Norseman Per Postmaster was one day driving a great poet. While they were driving along, says the simple-minded Per Postmaster, says he: "Beg pardon, what would you say making poetry was, in your opinion?" —The great poet produces a pursed-lips expression, braces his chicken breast to the utmost, and delivers himself of the following words: "To make poetry is to summon oneself to the Day of Judgment."—Whereupon the Norseman Per Postmaster felt himself stricken in every joint.

Eleven o'clock. My shoes, where the devil are my shoes?—Well, talk of bristling up against everything and everybody——

A tall, pale lady, dressed in black and with the reddest of smiles, she wished me well, plucked me by the sleeve, and tried to stop me. "Now if you can make as much stir as the poet," said she, "you will at any rate be entitled to your say," said she.

"He he," I replied. "I, who don't even know a poet and have never talked to one; I, who am an agronomist and have lived among guano and bran mash since I was a

child; I, who can't even make poetry about an umbrella, to say nothing of death and life and everlasting peace!"

"Well, well, or any other great man," she says. "You go putting on side and abusing all great men, but the great men are not hurt by it and they'll last your time, you'll see."

"Madam," I replied, and I made a respectful bow; "Madam, you can't imagine what a semi-educated sound, what a cheap intellectual sound there is in what you say. Excuse me, by the way, for speaking so bluntly; but if you were a man instead of a woman, I'd bet my life you were a liberal. I don't abuse all great men; what I do is this, I don't judge a man's greatness by the amount of stir he has brought about; I judge him from within myself, by the estimate of my own little brain, by my power of intellectual appreciation. I judge him, so to speak, by the taste his work leaves in my mouth. This is not putting on side; it is the result of the subjective logic of my blood. What matters above all is not to produce a stir, to get Kingo's hymn-book superseded by Landstad's in Höivaag parish near Lillesand. It isn't at all a question of raising a rumpus among a lot of lawyers, journalists, or Galilean fishermen, or of publishing a book about Napoleon *le petit*. What does matter is bringing an influence to bear on those who have the *power,* the elect, the men at the top, the masters, Caiaphas, Pilate, Cæsar. What do I gain by making a stir among the mob if I am committed to the cross in spite of it all? You can make the mob numerous enough to be able to snatch a shred of sovereignty with its nails; you can put a butcher's knife in its hands and bid it stab and slash, and you can donkey-drive it on to win a majority in an election; but as to winning a *victory,* gaining in basic spiritual values, profiting the world an iota—no, it can't do that, the mob can't do that. Your great men are excellent topics of conversa-

tion, but the supreme man, the supreme men, the masters, the leaders of thought on horseback, be sure they have to think hard who it is when the great men are named. And so your great man is left behind, with the crowd, the worthless majority, the lawyer, the schoolmistress, the journalist, and the Emperor of Brazil, for his admirers."

"Ah," says the lady ironically—the chairman uses his hammer and demands silence, but the lady goes on just the same—"Ah, but as you don't attack *all* great men, let us hear of some, or at any rate one who finds favour even in your sight. It would be amusing to hear it."

I answer: "I could easily do that. But the trouble is that you take me so brutally at my word. If I mentioned one or two or ten, you would simply assume that beyond these I didn't know of any more. And besides, why should I do it? If, for instance, I gave you the choice between Leo Tolstoy, Jesus Christ, and Immanuel Kant, you would still hesitate before choosing the right one. You would say something of this sort, that all these were great men, each after his fashion, and in that the whole liberal and advanced press would agree with you.—"

"Well, but who is the greatest of these, in your opinion?" she interrupts.

"In my opinion, madam, the greatest is not he who had most talent for retailing, though now and always it is he who makes most noise in the world. No, the voice of *my* blood tells me that he is greatest who has endowed life with most basic value, most positive profit. The great terrorist is greatest, the dimension, the immense lever which can raise worlds."

"But then of the three you mentioned it must be Christ who——?"

"It is Christ, yes!" I hasten to say. "You are quite right, madam, and I am glad we are agreed on this point at all events.—No, take it altogether I put the gift of re-

tailing, the gift of preaching, very low, a purely formal talent for always having the patter ready. What is a preacher, a professional preacher? A man who serves the negative office of a salesman, a traveller in goods. And the more he does in his goods, the greater his world-renown; he he, so it is, the more he shouts his wares, the more he can extend the business. But how much weight do you attach to preaching Faust's opinions on existence to my worthy neighbour Ola Nordistuen? Do you suppose that will alter the thinking of the coming century?"

"But how is Ola Nordistuen to get on if nobody——?"

"Let Ola Nordistuen go to hell!" I interrupt her. "Ola Nordistuen has nothing at all to do in this world but to go and wait for death till he's blue in the face; that is, to get out of the way the sooner the better. Ola Nordistuen exists to manure the earth, he is the soldier that Napoleon tramples under his horse's hoofs; that is Ola Nordistuen—so now you know it! Why, devil dance me, Ola Nordistuen isn't even a beginning, much less a result of anything; he is not a comma in the great book, but a spot on the paper. That is Ola Nordistuen.—"

"Hush! For God's sake!" says the lady, looking up in terror to see if the chairman will throw me out.

"Good!" I reply, "good, I'll say no more." But at that moment I catch sight of her lovely mouth and I say: "I beg your pardon, madam, for detaining you so long with my chatter. And allow me to thank you for your kindness. You have a wonderfully beautiful mouth when you smile. Adieu."

But now she blushes all over her face and invites me home. Actually invites me home, to where she lives. She lives in such and such a street, number so-and-so. She would like to talk to me a little more about this; she doesn't agree with me and might have a great many objec-

tions to make. If I would come to-morrow evening, she would be quite alone. Would I come to-morrow evening, then? Thanks. Good-bye till then.

And after all the only thing she wanted was to show me a new soft rug, a national pattern, Hallingdal weaving.

Deia—and the sun is shining on heia——

He jumped out of bed, pulled up the blinds and looked out. The sun was shining on the square, and the weather was calm. He rang. He meant to take advantage of Sara's neglect with his shoes to get to closer quarters with her to-day. Let us see what she is made of, this Trondhjem girl with the eyes full of sex. Probably nothing but humbug.

He promptly put his arm round her waist.

"Now none of that!" she said angrily and pushed him away.

Then he asked coldly: "Why haven't I had my shoes before?"

"Oh, you must really excuse us to-day," replied Sara. "It's washing-day and we've such a lot to do."

He stayed at home till twelve, when he went out to the churchyard and attended Karlsen's funeral. As usual he wore his bright buff suit.

V

WHEN Nagel reached the churchyard no one had yet arrived. He went up to the grave and looked down into it; two white flowers were lying at the bottom. Who had thrown them in, and with what object? I have seen those white flowers before, he thought. Suddenly it occurred to him that he wanted shaving. He looked at his watch, thought a moment, and then walked quickly back into the town. In the middle of the square he saw the Magistrate's Deputy coming towards him; Nagel made straight for him and gave him a look, but neither man said anything, nor did they salute each other. Nagel went into the barber's shop. At that moment the church bells began to toll for the funeral.

Nagel took his time, didn't speak to anyone, didn't utter a single word, but spent several minutes examining the pictures on the walls, went from one wall to another, and looked at every one. At last his turn came and he got into the chair.

Just as he was finished and stepped into the street, he saw the Deputy again, looking as if he had come back and was waiting for something. He carried a stick in his left hand, but as soon as he caught sight of Nagel, he changed it over to his right and began to swing it. The two walked slowly towards each other. He had no stick when I met him a little while ago, said Nagel to himself. It's not new; he hasn't bought it, but borrowed it. It's a cane.

When they were alongside one another, the Deputy stopped; Nagel also halted; both came to a standstill almost

at the same moment. Then Nagel pushed his velvet cap forward, as though to scratch the back of his head, and put it straight again; meanwhile the Deputy struck his stick hard against the pavement and leaned back upon it. He stood thus for a few seconds, still without saying anything. Suddenly he straightened himself, turned his back on Nagel, and went his way. Finally Nagel saw his back disappear round the barber's corner.

This piece of dumb show took place in the sight of several people. Amongst others a man who was selling lottery tickets from a revolving cylinder saw the whole thing. A little farther off sat a man who dealt in plaster figures, and this man had also observed the curious performance; Nagel recognized in the plaster merchant one of the customers who had witnessed the scene in the café the evening before and had afterwards taken his part with the landlord.

When Nagel arrived at the churchyard for the second time, the clergyman was already giving his address. The place was black with people. Nagel walked towards the grave, but sat down by himself on a large, new marble slab, which bore the following inscription: "Vilhelmine Meek. Born 20th May 1873. Died 16th February 1891." There was nothing more. The slab was perfectly new and the turf on which it rested had just been laid.

Nagel beckoned to a small boy.

"Do you see that man over there, the one in the brown coat?" he asked.

"The one with the peaked cap? That's Minutten."

"Go and ask him to come here."

And the boy went.

When Minutten came, Nagel got up, gave him his hand, and said: "Good day, my friend. I'm glad to see you again. Have you got the coat?"

"The coat? No, not yet. But I shall get it all right,"

replied Minutten. "May I thank you so much for yesterday—thanks for everything! Well, well, to-day we're burying Karlsen. Ah, we must resign ourselves to it, in God's name."

They both sat down on the new marble slab and talked. Nagel took a pencil out of his pocket and wrote something on the slab.

"Who is it that's buried here?" he asked.

"Vilhelmine Meek. But we used to call her just Mina for short. She was almost a child; I don't think she was twenty."

"No, she wasn't as much as eighteen even, according to the inscription. Was she another good girl?"

"You say that so strangely; but——"

"You see, I've noticed the nice way you have of speaking well of everybody, whoever they may be."

"If you had known Mina Meek, I'm sure you would have agreed with me. She was quite an unusually good soul. If anyone is an angel of God, she is one now."

"Was she engaged?"

"Engaged? No, far from it. Not that I know of. She can't have been engaged; she was always reading and she talked aloud with God, often in the middle of the street, where everybody could hear her. And then people stopped and stood still; everybody was fond of Mina Meek."

Nagel put away his pencil. There was something written on the stone, a verse; it did not look well on the white marble.

Minutten said: "You attract a lot of attention. I stood over there listening to the address, but I noticed that at least half the people were taken up with you."

"With me?"

"Yes. Several of them were whispering and asking who you were. And now they're looking this way."

"What lady is that with the big black feather in her hat?"

"The one with the white stick to her parasol? That's Fredrikke Andresen, Fröken Fredrikke that I told you about. And the one by her side, looking this way just now, that's the daughter of the Chief Constable; her name's Fröken Olsen, Gudrun Olsen. Oh, I know them all. Dagny Kielland is here too; she has on a black dress to-day and it suits her almost better than any other; have you seen her? Well, they've all got black dresses on to-day, naturally; I'm talking nonsense. Do you see that gentleman with the blue spring overcoat and the spectacles? That's Dr. Stenersen. He's not the one that's District doctor here, he's only in private practice and he was married last year. His wife's standing farther off; I don't know whether you can see a little dark lady with a silk border to her cloak? That's Fru Stenersen. She is rather an invalid and always has to wear plenty of clothes. And there comes the Deputy——"

Nagel asked: "Can you show me Fröken Kielland's *fiancé?*"

"No; that's Lieutenant Hansen. He's not here, he's on a cruise; it's several days since he left; he left just after they were engaged."

After a short silence Nagel said: "There were two flowers lying at the bottom of the grave, two white flowers—I suppose you don't know where they came from?"

"Yes," answered Minutten. "That is—— Do you want to know? Must I answer?—I'm ashamed to tell you; perhaps I might have been allowed to place them on the coffin if I had asked, instead of throwing them away as I did; but what was the good of two flowers? And wherever I put them they wouldn't be more than two flowers. So what I did was to get up a little after three

this morning, last night I might say, and put them in the grave. And I went down into it and arranged them properly and said good-bye to him twice aloud while I was at the bottom of the grave. It made such a deep impression on me that I went into the woods and hid my face in my hands with sorrow. It's a strange thing to part with anyone for ever, and though Jens Karlsen was so much above me in every way, he was still a good friend to me."

"So they were from you, those flowers?"

"Yes, they were from me. But it wasn't to show off that I did it, God is my witness. It's nothing to talk about either, a trifle like that. I bought them yesterday evening after I had seen you. It happened like this, Uncle gave me a half-crown for myself when I brought him your money; he was so glad, he nearly pulled me off my feet. Yes, he'll come one day to thank you; oh, yes, he will, I'm sure he will. But when I had this half-crown, I suddenly remembered that I hadn't got any flowers for the funeral, and so I went down to the quay——"

"You went down to the quay?"

"Yes, to a lady who lives there."

"In a one-storey house?"

"Yes."

"Has the lady white hair?"

"Yes, perfectly white hair; have you seen her? She's the daughter of a sea-captain, but is very poor for all that. At first she wouldn't take my half-crown; but I left it lying on a chair, though she protested and said no several times. She is so bashful and I'm sure she often suffers for her modesty."

"Do you know what her name is?"

"Martha Gude."

"Martha Gude." Nagel took out his note-book, wrote

down her name and said: "Has she been married? Is she a widow?"

"No. She used to go to sea with her father as long as he had a ship, but since he died she has lived here."

"Then hasn't she any relations?"

"I don't know. No, I don't think she can have."

"Then what does she live on?"

"God knows what she lives on. Nobody knows. But anyhow she must have something from the parish."

"Look here, you say you've been in to see this lady, this Martha Gude. Tell me what her home looks like."

"How would you expect a poor old cottage like that to look? There's a bed, a table, a couple of chairs; now I think of it, there must be three chairs, for there was another one in the corner by the bed; it's covered in red plush, but has to lean against the wall or it couldn't stand up; it's as bad as that. I don't remember that there was anything more."

"Is there really nothing more? Isn't there a clock hanging on the wall, an old picture, or anything of that sort?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"That chair that won't stand up, I mean the one with the red plush, what does that look like? Is it very old? Why does it stand by the bed? Won't it bear sitting on? Is it a chair with a high back?"

"Yes, a high back, I think; I don't remember rightly."

Over by the grave they had begun to sing; the ceremony was at an end. When the hymn was finished, there was a moment of absolute silence; then people began to disperse in all directions. The greater number went down the churchyard to the big gate; others stayed talking quietly among themselves. A group of ladies and gentlemen came in the direction of Minutten and Nagel, young people all of them, ladies whose bright eyes looked the

pair up and down in surprise. Dagny Kielland's face flushed deeply, but she kept her eyes fixed straight before her and looked neither to right nor left; the Deputy did not look up either, but talked to one of the ladies in a subdued tone.

Just as they were passing, Dr. Stenersen, who was also one of the party, stopped. He beckoned to Minutten, who got up. Nagel was left sitting alone.

"Will you ask that gentleman——" he heard the Doctor say; more he could not catch. But a moment later his name was mentioned pretty loudly, and then he got up. He took off his cap and bowed low.

The Doctor made an apology: he was charged with an unpleasant duty by a lady, one of the ladies he was accompanying, Fröken Meek, to ask the gentlemen to be rather careful of that stone, that slab, and not to sit on it. The slab was new; it had just been laid, the base was not yet dry, the turf quite soft, so that it might all collapse before you knew where you were. It was the deceased's sister who made the request.

Nagel begged ever so many pardons; it was a piece of thoughtlessness, carelessness, on his part, and he quite understood the lady's anxiety. He thanked the Doctor too.

Meanwhile they were moving on. When they reached the gate Minutten said good-bye, and the Doctor and Nagel were left alone. Then they introduced themselves.

The Doctor asked: "And now perhaps you intend to make some stay here?"

"Yes," replied Nagel. "One must follow the fashion, you know, go into the country in the summer and take a holiday, brace oneself up for the winter and start fresh. —This is a cheerful little town you have here."

"Where are you from? I've been trying to place your accent."

"I come from Finmark originally, I'm a Finn. But I've lived all over the place."

"Have you just come from abroad?"

"Only from Helsingfors."

They talked first of commonplace things, but soon drifted to other topics, the elections, the crop failure in Russia, literature, the deceased Karlsen.

"What is your opinion? Have you been burying a suicide to-day?" asked Nagel.

The Doctor could not say, would not say. It was no concern of his and so he did not wish to meddle with it. People said all sorts of things. But for that matter, why shouldn't it be a suicide? All theologians ought to make away with themselves.

Why exactly?

Why? Because their day was over, because our century had made them superfluous. People had begun to think for themselves, and their religious feeling had become more and more effaced.

Liberal! thought Nagel. He couldn't make out what mankind was to gain if life was stripped of all its symbols, all its poetry. Besides which it might be questioned whether the age had rendered theologians superfluous, seeing that the religious feeling was by no means in decay.—

Perhaps not in the lower strata of society—though even there signs were not wanting—but among enlightened people it was decidedly on the wane.

"However, we won't talk any more about that," the Doctor broke off; "our points of view are too far apart." The Doctor was a free-thinker; the Doctor had heard these objections before, more times than he could count. And had they converted him? For twenty years he had remained the same. As a medical man he had assisted in removing people's "souls" by the spoonful! No, he had

outgrown superstition.—"What do you think of the elections?"

"The elections?" Nagel laughed. "I hope for the best," said he.

"Yes, so do I," said the Doctor. It would be an everlasting shame if the Ministry did not get a majority for so thoroughly democratic a program. The Doctor was a liberal and a radical, had been so ever since he began to have a little sense. He was awfully afraid of Buskerud. Smaalenene he gave up. "The fact is," he said, "we haven't enough cash on our side. Now you and others like you who have the cash, you ought to support us. For I assure you the whole future of the country is at a stake."

"I? I have the cash?" said Nagel. "Ah, in a very small way, I'm afraid."

"Well, well, even if you're not exactly a millionaire. Somebody was saying that you were made of money, that you had, for instance, a property worth sixty-two thousand crowns."

"I never heard such nonsense. All it amounts to is that just lately I've inherited a trifle from my mother, a few thousand crowns; that's all. But as for landed property, I have none; that's a mystification."

They had arrived at the Doctor's house, a two-storeyed house painted yellow, with a veranda. The paint had come off in several places; the gutters were bent and broken. A pane of glass was missing on the first floor; the curtains were far from clean. Nagel was repelled by the untidy appearance of the house and wanted to go at once, but the Doctor said: "Won't you come in? No? Then I hope I'll see you another time. Both my wife and I will be very glad if you'll come and see us. You won't come in now and say how d'ye do to my wife?"

"Fru Stenersen was in the churchyard, wasn't she? She will scarcely be home yet."

"Why, of course, you're right; she was with the others. Well, look in some time when you're passing."

Nagel strolled back to the hotel, but just as he was entering the door something occurred to him. He snapped his fingers, gave a little laugh, and said aloud: "It would be fun to see if the verse is still there!" With that he went back to the churchyard and stopped by Mina Meek's tombstone. There was nobody to be seen anywhere; but the verse had been wiped off. Who had done it? There was no trace left of his writing.

VI

NEXT morning Nagel found himself in a rare and cheerful frame of mind. It had come upon him while he lay in bed; the ceiling of his room seemed to rise and rise into infinity till it became the clear and distant vault of heaven. And all at once he felt a gentle, fragrant breeze upon him, as though he lay in the open amid green grass. The flies were buzzing about the room; it was a warm summer morning.

He got into his clothes in a jiffy, left the hotel without his breakfast, and sauntered through the town. It was then eleven o'clock.

The pianos were already tinkling from house to house; a diversity of tunes floated through the open windows wherever he went, and a nervous dog loudly made answer from the street in long-drawn howls. Nagel was filled with a sense of pleasure; he was moved to sing softly to himself, and on passing an old man who saluted him he found an opportunity to slip a coin into his hand.

He came to a big white house. A first-floor window was thrown open and a slender white hand fixed the catch. The curtain was still stirring, the hand was still resting on the catch, and Nagel had a feeling that somebody was watching him from behind the curtain. He stopped and looked up; he held his ground for over a minute, but nobody came in sight. He looked at the plate on the door: F. M. Andresen, Danish Consulate.

Nagel was just going, but, as he turned, Fröken Fredrikke thrust her long, well-bred face out of the window and her eyes followed him with surprise. He

stopped again, their eyes met, her cheeks began to colour; but, as though putting a bold face on it, she pushed up her sleeves and leaned her elbows on the window-sill. She stayed like that quite a long time; nothing happened, so at last Nagel had to make an end of it and move on. Then a queer question came into his head—was the young lady kneeling at the window? If so, he thought, the Consul's rooms must be pretty low, as the window was scarcely more than six feet high and the top of it was only a foot below the eaves. He couldn't help laughing at himself for this far-fetched idea; what the devil had he to do with Consul Andresen's rooms?

And he strolled on.

Down by the quay work was in full swing. Warehousemen, customs officers and fishermen jostled each other, busy with their own affairs; capstans rattled; two steamers blew their sirens and left almost together. The sea was dead calm; the sun beat down and turned the water to a single plate of gold, set with ships and boats. From a huge three-master far out came the sounds of a wretched barrel-organ, and when there was a brief respite from capstans and steam whistles, its mournful melody sounded like a quavering, expiring girl's voice on the point of giving up. And evidently the crew of the three-master were making fun of the barrel-organ and dancing a polka to its affecting strains.

Nagel caught sight of a child, a tiny girl who was hugging a cat in her arms; the cat hung straight down so that its hind legs almost touched the ground, perfectly patient, and never moved. Nagel patted the girl's cheek and spoke to her: "Is that your cat?"

"Yes. Two—four—six—seven."

"Why, you can count too?"

"Yes. Seven—eight—eleven—two—four—six—seven."

He continued his walk. Out towards the parsonage a

white dove, drunk with sunshine, reeled sideways down from the sky and disappeared behind the tree-tops; it looked like a shining silver arrow falling to earth in the distance. A short, almost inaudible shot was fired somewhere, and a moment later a film of blue smoke rose from the wood on the other side of the bay.

When he had come to the last of the wharves and had strolled up and down the empty quay a few times, he mounted the hill without thinking and made his way into the woods. He walked for a good half-hour, farther and farther into the wood, and stopped at last on a little path. All was still; not even a little bird was to be seen, and not a cloud in the sky. He turned aside a few steps, found a dry spot, and lay on his back at full length. To the right he had the parsonage, to the left the town, and above him the infinite ocean of blue sky.

What would it be like up there, floating about among suns and feeling comets' tails stroking one's forehead? How small the earth was and how puny its inhabitants; a Norway with two million bumpkins and a loan bank to help feed them! What sort of a life was it, to live for just that? You elbowed your way on in the sweat of your brow for your few allotted years, only to perish after all! Nagel scratched his head. Oh, the end of it would be that he'd get out of the world and put a full stop to it all! Would he ever screw himself up to doing it? Yes. By God in heaven, yes, he would not shrink! And at that moment he was wild with delight at having this simple escape in reserve; tears of rapture came into his eyes and he breathed aloud. He was already cradled on the ocean of the sky, fishing with a silver hook and singing the while. And his boat was of scented wood and the oars flashed like white wings, but the sail was of pale blue silk and it was cut in the shape of a half moon——

A tremor of joy filled him; he lost himself, was carried

away and wrapt in the frenzy of sunshine. The stillness made him quite delirious with satisfaction; nothing disturbed him; the only sound was the soft murmur up in the air, the hum of the vast machinery, God working his treadmill. In the woods around not a leaf stirred, not a fir-needle. Nagel curled up with pleasure, drew up his knees, and hugged himself because everything was so good. It called to him and he answered yes; he propped himself on his elbow and looked around. Nobody was there. He said yes once more and listened; but nobody appeared. This was strange, though; he had clearly heard somebody calling him; but he thought no more of it, perhaps it was only imagination; at any rate he was not going to be disturbed. He was in a mysterious state, filled with psychic pleasure; every nerve in him was awake; he had music in his blood, felt akin to all nature, to the sun and the mountains and everything else, felt surrounded by a whisper of his own ego-sense from trees and tufts and blades of grass. His soul swelled with the full tone of an organ within him and he never forgot how the sweet music welled up and down in his blood.

He lay for some time yet, enjoying his solitude. Then he heard footsteps on the path, real footsteps that there was no mistaking. He put his head up and saw a man coming from the town. The man had a long loaf of bread under his arm and was leading a cow behind him on a rope; he wiped the sweat off his face time after time and walked in his shirt-sleeves on account of the heat; but, for all that, he had a thick red woollen muffler wound twice round his neck. Nagel kept quiet and watched the peasant. There you had him! There was the bumpkin, the Norseman, he he; ay, there was the native, with *Kaka* under his arm and *Kua* in tow! Oh, what a sight! God help you, my bold Norse viking, if you untied your muffler a moment and let *Lusa* out! It would finish you; you'd

catch fresh air and die. And the press would mourn your premature decease and make a stunt of it; but to guard against similar tragedies the Liberal deputy Vetle Vetlesen would bring in a bill in the Storthing for strict conservation of the national vermin.

Nagel's brain gave birth to one bitter joke after another. He got up and went home, irritated and despondent. No, everything proved him right; there was nothing but lice and old cheese and Luther's catechism anywhere. And the people were middle-sized citizens living in three-storeyed cabins; they ate and drank sufficient for the day, took their ease with toddy and politics, and dealt, day in, day out, in soft soap and brass combs and fish. But at night when it thundered they took to reading Johann Arndt from sheer fright.* Well, show us a single real exception; see if you can find one! Bring us for instance a complicated crime, a notable sin! None of your ridiculous commonplace A B C transgressions; no, a rare and terrifying debauch, a refinement of profligacy, a royal sin, full of hell's raw splendour. No, it was pettifogging all through, the whole thing. What do you think of the elections, sir? I'm awfully afraid of Buskerud.—

But when he came back to the quays and saw their busy life around him, his spirits grew brighter; he was happy once more and began to sing again. It was no weather for moping; it was fair weather, fine weather, a blazing June day. The whole little town lay blinking in the sunshine like an enchanted city.

When he passed through the hotel door, he had long forgotten all his bitterness; his heart was without malice, and within him shone the bright vision of a boat of scented wood with a pale blue, silken sail, cut in the shape of a half-moon.

* Johann Arndt, 1555–1621, Lutheran theologian and writer of works of edification.—Tr.

His mood did not desert him all day. He went out again towards evening, took the same road down to the sea, and once more found a thousand trifles to delight him. The sun was sinking; its brutal glare was abated and shed itself softly over the water; even the noise from the ships had a quieter sound. Nagel saw that flags were flying here and there across the bay; several houses in the town had also hoisted their flags, and very soon work came to a standstill on all the quays.

He didn't think anything of this, but strolled again into the woods, walked as far as the outhouses of the parsonage, and looked into the yard. From there he went back into the woods, plunged into the darkest spot he could find, and sat down on a rock. He rested his head in one hand and drummed on his knee with the other. He stayed thus for a long time, perhaps a whole hour, and when at last he got up and left the place, the sun was below the horizon, and the first shades of dusk had spread over the town.

A great surprise awaited him. On coming out of the wood he discovered a number of bonfires alight on the hills, perhaps as many as twenty, blazing like little suns on every side. The water was crowded with boats, and the people in them were striking matches which gave red and green flares. One of the boats, in which a quartet was singing, even sent up rockets. Everybody was out of doors; the steamer pier was black with people walking and sitting down.

Nagel gave a little cry of surprise. He turned to a man and asked what might be the meaning of the flags and bonfires. The man looked at him, spat, looked at him again, and said it was the 23rd of June, Midsummer Eve. Ah, so it was Midsummer Eve! Yes, by the way, that was quite right; there was no mistake about it, the date was right too. Think of it, Midsummer Eve to-night;

one good thing was piled on another, it was Midsummer Eve into the bargain! Nagel rubbed his hands with glee and strolled away to the steamer pier like the rest, repeating to himself over and over again that he was in for an extraordinary piece of luck.

Among a group of ladies and gentlemen he saw at a distance Dagny Kielland's blood-red parasol, and on discovering that Dr. Stenersen was in the same party he went up to him without hesitation. He bowed, pressed the Doctor's hand, and stood bare-headed a long while. The Doctor introduced him to the company: Fru Stenersen also gave him her hand and he sat down beside her. She was pale, with a greyish complexion which gave her a sickly look; but she was very young, scarcely over twenty. She was well wrapped up.

Nagel put on his cap and said to the company in general: "I beg you'll excuse my intrusion, my appearing uncalled-for like this——"

"Not at all, it's a pleasure to see you," interrupted Fru Stenersen amiably. "I dare say you could give us a song, couldn't you?"

"No, I can't do that," he replied; "I'm as devoid of musical talent as anyone could be."

"On the contrary, you were quite right to come," the Doctor put in. "We were just talking about you. You play the violin, don't you?"

"No," replied Nagel again, shaking his head; he smiled too. "I don't." But suddenly, without rhyme or reason, he jumped up and said, with gleaming eyes: "Yes, I'm happy to-day. It has been so lovely all day, from the time I woke up; I have been walking in the most beautiful dream for ten hours. Imagine it—I am literally haunted by the fancy that I'm in a boat of scented wood with a sail of pale blue silk, cut in the shape of a half-moon. Isn't that fine? The scent of the boat I can't

describe; I couldn't do it however hard I tried, no matter how clever I might be at finding the right words. But you see, I imagine I'm out fishing and I'm using a silver hook. Excuse me, don't you ladies at any rate think that's—— Well, I don't know."

None of the ladies made any reply; they looked at each other in embarrassment, asking with their eyes what was to be done. But in the end they began to laugh, one after the other; they showed no mercy, but laughed out loud at the whole thing.

Nagel looked from one to the other; his eyes had not lost their brightness, and obviously he was still thinking of his boat with the blue sail. But his hands trembled a little, though his face was calm.

The Doctor came to the rescue: "I see, it's a sort of hallucination that——"

"No, pardon me," he replied. "Well, yes, if you like; why not? It doesn't matter what you *call* it. I've been in such a delightful rapture all day, whether it's hallucination or whether it isn't. It began this morning while I was still in bed. I heard a fly buzzing, that was the first thing that reached my consciousness on waking; next I saw the sunlight filtering through a hole in the curtain, and at one stroke a fine, bright mood sprang up within me. I had a feeling of summer in my soul; imagine a soft whispering in the grass, and then imagine that this whisper goes through your heart. Hallucination—well, I dare say it was, I don't know; but I want you to note that I must have been in a certain definite state of receptivity, that I heard the fly just at the right moment, that at that moment I required just that kind of light and just so much of it—that is, only one ray of sunlight from a hole in the curtain—and so on. But when I got up and went out, I saw, first a beautiful lady at a window"—he glanced at Fröken Andresen, who dropped her eyes—"after that a

great number of ships, then a little girl holding a cat in her arms, and so on, every one of which things made its own impression on me. Soon after, I went into the woods, and there it was that I had the vision of the boat and the half-moon sail, simply by lying on my back and staring up at the sky."

The ladies were still laughing and it looked as if their giggles would infect the Doctor; he said with a smile: "And so it was a silver hook you were fishing with?"

"Yes, a silver hook."

"Ha ha ha!"

Then the blood suddenly mounted to Dagny Kielland's cheeks and she said: "I can quite understand an image of that sort—I for my part can see the boat quite clearly, with its sail, a blue crescent—and then the silver hook shining white through the water. I think it's lovely."

She could not say any more; she stammered and stuck fast with her eyes on the ground.

Nagel released her at once: "Don't you think so? And this is what I said to myself straight away: Look out, this is a white dream, a warning. It's meant to remind you to fish with clean hooks, clean hooks! You were asking, Doctor, whether I played. I don't play, I can't; I drag about a violin case, but there isn't even a violin in it; the case is full of soiled linen, worse luck. I only thought it would look well to have a violin case amongst my baggage; that's why I got it. I don't know whether this gives you too bad an impression of me; I can't help it if it does, though I'm really sorry for it. You see, it's the silver hook that's to blame for it all."

The ladies, taken aback, had stopped laughing; even the Doctor, Reinert—the Magistrate's Deputy—and Holtan, the schoolmaster, sat staring with open mouths. Everybody's eyes were turned on Nagel; evidently the Doctor did not know what to think. What in the world was the

matter with this outlandish fellow? Nagel himself quietly sat down and looked as if he had nothing more to say. There seemed no end to the painful silence; but then Fru Stenersen came to the rescue. She was amiability itself, like a mother to them all, ready to see that no one was made to look foolish. She purposely wrinkled her brow and made herself look older than she was, simply to give her words greater weight.

"You come from abroad, Herr Nagel?"

"Yes, Frue."

"From Helsingfors, I think my husband said?"

"Yes, from Helsingfors. That is, Helsingfors is the last place I was at. I'm an agronomist; I was at the school there a little while."

Pause.

"And what do you think of the town?" Fru Stenersen asked again.

"Of Helsingfors?"

"No, this town."

"Oh, it's a fine town, a charming place! I'll never go away from here; no, I really won't. Don't be too frightened though; perhaps I'll go away some day all the same; it depends on circumstances.—By the by," he said, getting up again, "if I intruded by coming into your circle, I hope you'll excuse it. The fact is, it would give me such pleasure to be allowed to sit here amongst you. I must tell you, I don't meet many people and I'm a complete stranger here, so I've got into the way of talking too much to myself. You will do me a kindness by completely ignoring my presence and resuming your conversation as though I were not here."

"I must say, though, you've brought in a good deal of diversion since you came," said Reinert with an angry snarl.

To which Nagel replied: "Ah, to you, sir, I have a

private apology to make and I will give you any satisfaction you may require; but not now—eh? Not now?"

"No, this is hardly the place," Reinert agreed.

"Over and above, I feel happy to-day," Nagel went on, and a warm smile flitted across his features. This smile brightened his face; for a moment he had the look of a child.—"It's a wonderful evening this, and soon the stars will be out. Fires are burning everywhere on the hills, and from the water comes the sound of singing. Listen now, it's not so bad. I know nothing about it, but isn't it pretty good? It reminds me a little of a night on the Mediterranean, off the coast of Tunis. There were about a hundred passengers on board, a choral society from somewhere in Sardinia. I did not belong to the company and could not sing; I simply sat on deck and listened to the choir singing below in the saloon. It went on nearly all night; I shall never forget how well it sounded in the close night air. I quietly closed all the doors to the saloon, bottled up the singing as it were, and then it was as though the sound came from the bottom of the sea—as though the ship were sailing into eternity amid a peal of music. Imagine something in the way of a sea full of song, a subterranean choir."

Fröken Andresen, who was sitting next to Nagel, could not help saying: "Oh, how lovely it must have been!"

"I have only once heard anything more beautiful, and that was in a dream. But it's a long time ago now, it was when I was a child; one doesn't have such beautiful dreams after one is grown up."

"Don't you think so?" said Fröken Andresen.

"Oh, no. Well, of course that's an exaggeration, but—I remember my last dream so clearly: I saw an open swamp—— Excuse me though, I'm doing all the talking and forcing myself on you. You'll find me a bore before I've done; I always talk such a lot."

Then Dagny Kielland opened her lips and said: "I'm sure we should all rather listen to you than tell any story of our own."—And, bending her head to Fru Stenersen, she whispered: "Can't you get him to? Do try. Just hear what a voice he has."

Nagel said with a smile: "I'm quite ready to go on chattering. I'm just in the vein to-night; goodness knows what has come over me.—Well, the little dream I was talking about was nothing much. As I say, I saw an open swamp, with no trees, nothing but a mass of roots running in all directions like strangely contorted serpents. And then I saw a madman walking about among all these twisted roots. I can see him now; he was pale and had a dark beard, but his beard was so thin that his face showed through it everywhere. He stared about him with wide eyes, which were full of suffering. I hid behind a rock and called to him. He turned his eyes at once to the rock and was not startled at hearing my cry; it seemed that he knew very well where I was, though I had hidden myself well. He continued to stare at the rock the whole time. I thought to myself: he won't find me all the same, and if he does, I can make a bolt. And though I didn't like his staring at me I called out again to rile him. He took a couple of steps towards me with his mouth open as if ready to bite, but he couldn't make any headway; the roots piled themselves up in front of him; he was entangled in them and couldn't move. I called again, called time after time to make him properly irritated, and he started tugging at the roots to get them out of the way; he flung whole armfuls of them aside and struggled hard to reach me; but it was no good. He began groaning too, so that I could hear it where I was, and his eyes were stiff with pain. But when I saw that I was perfectly safe, I stood up and waved my cap, showed myself in my full height and annoyed him by shouting

hallo continually, stamping on the ground and shouting hallo! I even went nearer to rile him a little more cruelly; I put out my fingers and pointed at him and shouted hallo offensively close to his ear, trying to upset him a little more if possible; after that I went back to my place and let him think about it. But he hadn't given up yet; he was still fighting with the roots, toiling obstinately and painfully to get them out of the way; he tore himself till the blood flowed, he hurt his face, he stood on tiptoe and yelled at me. Yes, just imagine, he stood right up on tiptoe and looked at me and yelled! And then his face was dripping with sweat and distorted with terrible suffering because he couldn't get at me. I wanted to push him a little farther still; I went up to him closer than before, snapped my fingers in front of his nose, and said Tehee he he in the most horribly offensive way. I slung a root at him and caught him on the mouth and nearly succeeded in bringing him down; but he only spat out the blood and put his hand to his mouth and went to work at the roots again. Then I thought I might venture to put out my hand and touch him; I just wanted to put my finger on his forehead and then get away. But at that moment he got hold of me. Lord, what a terrible feeling it was when he got hold of me! He made a violent grab and caught hold of my hand. I gave a shriek; but all he did was to hold my hand, and then he came with me. We went out of the swamp; the roots bothered him no more when he had hold of my hand, and we came to the rock where I had hidden at first. When we got there, the man threw himself at my feet and kissed the ground where I had trodden; he knelt before me, torn and bleeding, and thanked me for being good to him; he blessed me too and prayed God to bless me in return. His eyes were open and full of kind prayers to God for me, and he did not kiss my hand, nor even my shoe,

but the earth where my shoes had trodden. I asked him: 'Why do you kiss the ground just where I have walked?' —'Because,' said he, 'because my mouth is bleeding and I don't want to soil your shoes.'—He didn't want to soil my shoes!—Then I said again: 'But why do you thank me when I've only hurt you and caused you pain?'—'I thank you,' he answered, 'because you did not cause me *more* pain, because you were good to me and did not torture me still more.'—'I see,' said I, 'but why did you yell at me and open your mouth to bite me?'—'I wasn't going to bite you,' he answered; 'I opened my mouth to ask your help, but I couldn't get the words out and you didn't understand me. And then I called out in real pain.'—'Was that what made you call out?' I asked again. —'Yes, that was why.'—I looked at the madman, who was still spitting blood, but praying for me to God in spite of it; and then I saw that I had met him before and knew him; it was a middle-aged man with grey hair and a miserable little beard—it was Minutten."

Nagel said no more. A shock passed through the group. Reinert dropped his eyes and looked at the ground a long time.

"Minutten? Was it he?" asked Fru Stenersen.

"Yes, it was he," replied Nagel.

"Ugh, you've nearly given me the creeps."

"Fancy, I knew it!" said Dagny Kielland all at once.— "I knew it was he the moment you said he knelt down and kissed the ground. I assure you I recognized him. Have you talked to him much?"

"Oh no, I've only met him a couple of times.—But, I say, I seem to have spoilt your evening; Fru Stenersen, you're quite pale! What in the world—it was only a dream, you know."

"Yes, this won't do!" the Doctor joined in. "What the devil does it matter to us if Minutten—let him kiss the

root of every tree in Norway if he likes. Look here, there's Fröken Andresen crying. Ha ha ha!"

"I'm not crying at all," she retorted; "I shouldn't think of such a thing. But I don't mind confessing that this dream made an impression on me. And I'm pretty sure it did on you too."

"On me?" cried the Doctor. "Not a bit of it! I think you've all gone crazy. No, we'll take a stroll now. Up, everybody! The air's getting chilly. Aren't you cold, Jetta?"

"No, I'm not cold; let's stay where we are," replied his wife.

But now the Doctor had made up his mind for a stroll; he insisted on strolling; the air was getting chilly, he repeated, and he was going to move about if he had to go by himself. Then Nagel got up and went with him.

They strolled up and down the quay a few times, pushing their way through the crowd, chatting and returning people's greetings. When perhaps half an hour had passed in this way, Fru Stenersen called out to them:

"Come back now!—Do you know what we've thought of while you were away? Well, we've made up our minds to have a big party at our house to-morrow evening. Yes, you've got to come, Herr Nagel! But I must tell you first that a big party with us means nothing but the minimum of food and drink——"

"And the maximum of gossip, yes," interrupted the Doctor gaily. "Yes, I know the sort of thing. But it's not a bad idea; I've heard you suggest many worse things, Jetta."—The Doctor was all at once in a good humour and laughed good-naturedly all over his face at the prospect of the party.—"Mind you're not too late," he said; "please goodness I shan't be sent for."

"But can I appear in these clothes?" asked Nagel. "I have no others."

Everybody laughed and Fru Stenersen answered: "Of course. It's quite a friendly affair."

On the way home Nagel found himself walking by the side of Dagny Kielland. He had made no effort to come there; it was quite accidental; nor had she done anything to avoid him. She was just telling him how she looked forward to to-morrow evening because it was always so free and easy at the Doctor's, they were such delightful people and knew how to make things pleasant—when Nagel interrupted in a low voice: "May I hope, Fröken, that you have forgiven me my awful aberration the other day in the woods?"

He spoke excitedly, almost in a whisper, and she was forced to answer.

"Well," she said, "now I can understand your behaviour the other evening better. I'm sure you're not quite the same as everyone else."

"Thanks!" he whispered. "Oh, I thank you as I have never thanked anyone in my life! And why am I not the same as everyone else? You must know, Fröken Kielland, that I've been trying my hardest all the evening to soften the first impression you must have had of me. I haven't said a word that was not meant for you. What do you say to that? Remember, I had offended you grossly and I had to do something. I admit that I have certainly been in a rather unusual frame of mind all day long; but still I've made myself a good deal worse than I was and I've been playing a rather underhand game almost all the time. You see, the point was I had to get you to think that I was really somewhat unaccountable, that I was in the habit of committing outrageous blunders; in that way I hoped it would be so much easier to get you to excuse me. That was why I forced my dreams on you out of place and out of season, why I went so far as to give myself a severe showing-up in the mat-

ter of a violin case, voluntarily exposing a folly of my own without being obliged to——"

"Excuse me," she interrupted hastily, "but why do you go and tell me all this and spoil the whole thing over again?"

"I'm not spoiling it. If I tell you that I really yielded to a momentary, spiteful impulse the other day in the woods when I ran after you, then you will understand that. It was just an irresistible desire on my part to scare you, because you ran away. Well, I didn't know you then, of course. But if I now tell you that I am just the same as other people, you will understand that too. This evening I have made myself a laughing-stock and staggered the whole party by the most eccentric behaviour, simply to mollify you so far that you would at least listen to me when I came and explained myself. I have attained my object; you have listened to me and understood it all."

"No, I must frankly confess that I don't understand you quite. Let us leave it at that; I shan't spend my time brooding over——"

"No, of course not; why should you spend your time going into the question? But am I not right, this party for to-morrow evening was got up because you all thought I was an erratic person who might give you a lot of amusement? Perhaps I shall disappoint you; perhaps I shall only say hum and ha; perhaps I shan't come at all. God knows."

"Oh, but of course you must come."

"Must I?" he said and looked at her.

She said no more; they continued to walk side by side.

On reaching the road to the parsonage Fröken Kielland stopped. She burst out laughing and said: "No, I never heard anything like you!"—and she shook her head.

She stayed waiting for the rest of the party to come up. He wanted to ask if he might see her home, had just screwed up his courage to do so when she turned away from him and called to the schoolmaster: "Come on, Herr Holtan, come on!" And she beckoned eagerly with her hand to make him hurry.

VII

AT six o'clock the following evening Nagel entered the Doctor's drawing-room. He thought he had come too early, but the whole party of the previous evening was already assembled, besides a couple more who were strangers to him, a lawyer and a young, fair-haired student. They were already drinking brandy and seltzer at two tables; at a third the ladies, Reinert, and the young student sat talking. Holtan, the schoolmaster, that silent man who seldom or never uttered a sound, was downright drunk already and was holding forth in a loud, excited voice and with flushed cheeks on one subject after another. Now there was Serbia, where eighty per cent of the population could neither read nor write—were they so much better off there? That was what he'd like to know!—And the schoolmaster looked around with a savage air, though not a soul had contradicted him.

The hostess called to Nagel and made room for him at the ladies' table. What would he like to drink? They were just talking of Christiania, she said. And what an odd idea it was of Nagel to come and stay at a little place when he could go where he liked and might even be in Christiania.

Nagel didn't find this idea at all odd; hadn't he come into the country for a holiday? For that matter he wouldn't be in Christiania in any case; Christiania was one of the last places he would choose.

Really? But after all it was the capital. He must admit that it was the meeting-place of all the great men

and celebrities of the country, all the art and drama and everything.

Yes, and besides, all the foreigners that flocked to the place, Fröken Andresen remarked; foreign actors, singers, musicians, artists of every kind.

Dagny Kielland said nothing, she simply listened.

Oh yes, that might be true enough, Nagel admitted; but he didn't know how it was—every time Christiania was mentioned he had a vision of a bit of the old town and it smelt of clothes hung out to air. That was positively true, he wasn't inventing it. It gave him the notion of a priggish little town with a couple of churches, a couple of newspapers, one hotel, and a common pump, but with the greatest men in the world. He had never seen people put on so much side as they did there, and, good Lord, how often he had wished himself away when he was living there!

Reinert couldn't conceive how anyone could take such a dislike—not to a single person, but to a whole town, the capital of a country. Christiania was really not such a small place now, it was taking a position among cities of note. And the Grand Café was no mean café.

At first Nagel took no exception to the Grand; but after a few moments he frowned and remarked so that all could hear: "The Grand is a *unique* café."

"You don't sound as if you thought that."

Oh yes. The Grand was the famous place in town where all the great ones met. There you saw the world's greatest painters, the world's most hopeful young men, the world's most fashionable ladies, the world's cleverest editors, and the world's greatest poets! There they sat, puffing themselves out for each other's benefit—every one of them rejoicing in his soul at being appreciated by the rest. "I have seen nobodies sit there rubbing their hands with glee because other nobodies took notice of them."

This reply scandalized the whole company. Reinert leaned over to Fröken Kielland's chair and said in a fairly loud voice: "I never heard such conceited bosh!"

She woke up and glanced quickly at Nagel; he must certainly have heard what Reinert said, but he did not seem to mind. On the contrary, he drank with the young student, Oien, and began to talk unconcernedly of something else. In fact, his air of superiority annoyed her too; what kind of an opinion could he have of them all if he thought himself at liberty to offer them such insolence? What blatant conceit, what a swollen head! When Reinert asked her: "Well, what do you think?" she answered in an affectedly loud tone: "What I think? Why, I think Christiania's good enough for me."

Even this did not upset Nagel. On hearing this loud remark half-addressed to himself he turned and looked at her with an air of reflection, as though trying to remember how he might have offended her. He looked at her steadily for over a minute, blinking his eyes and considering, and all the time he wore an expression of sadness.

But by now the schoolmaster had found out what the talk was about and protested against Christiania being any smaller than Belgrade, for instance. In short, Christiania was no smaller than other capitals of a reasonable size—

At this everybody laughed; the schoolmaster looked too comic with his hot cheeks and his unshakable conviction. Lawyer Hansen, a fat little man with gold spectacles and a shining crown, couldn't stop laughing, slapped his knees and laughed again.

"A reasonable size, a reasonable size!" he shrieked. "Christiania is no smaller than other capitals of the same size, of exactly the same size. Not much smaller. Oh, my goodness! Here's to you!"

Nagel began talking to Oien again. Well, in his younger days he too—Nagel—had been keen on music, especially Wagner. But his interest had faded in the course of years. And he had never carried it beyond learning to read and play a note or two.

"On the piano?" asked Oien. The piano was his line.

"Not much! No, the violin. But, as I say, I made no progress and soon dropped it,"

His eyes chanced to fall on Fröken Andresen, who for the last quarter of an hour at least had been chatting with Reinert in a corner by the stove. Her eyes met Nagel's for an instant, unintentionally, but all the same she moved uneasily in her chair and could not find the words she was going to say.

Dagny was idly beating her hand with a rolled-up newspaper. Her long, white fingers were without rings. Nagel examined her furtively. Good God, how well she looked this evening! In this light, against the dark wall, her heavy plaits of fair hair looked even brighter than usual. As she sat her figure had a suggestion of fullness, which vanished when she stood up. She had a light, swaying walk, like a practised skater.

Nagel got up and went over to her.

For an instant she had shot her dark-blue glance at him, and he incontinently exclaimed: "God bless me, how pretty you are!"

She was utterly confused by his bluntness; her mouth stood open and she did not know which way to look. And then she whispered: "Do think of what you're saying!"

A moment later she got up and went to the piano, where she stood turning over the music with flaming cheeks.

The Doctor, who was burning to talk politics, asked suddenly at random: "Have any of you read to-day's papers? Damn me if *Morgenbladet* isn't going too far

these days! Its language is no longer that of decent people; it's vulgar abuse and slander all the time."

But the doctor couldn't get anywhere if nobody contradicted him. Lawyer Hansen knew this and said with sly geniality: "Might we not say that there are faults on both sides?"

"Now look here!" cried the Doctor, jumping up. "Do you mean to tell me——"

Supper was ready; the company passed into the dining-room, the Doctor still holding forth. The conversation was continued at table; Nagel, who had been placed between the hostess and young Fröken Olsen, the Chief Constable's daughter, took no part in it. By the time they left the table they were already deep in European politics, had discussed the Tsar, Constans, Parnell, and when at last they drifted on to the Balkan question, the drunken schoolmaster had another chance of falling upon Serbia. He had just been reading the *Statistische Monatschrift;* it was a frightful state of things, education totally neglected——

"There is one thing that rejoices me beyond measure," said the Doctor, and his eyes were quite moist—"and that is that Gladstone is still alive. Fill up, gentlemen, and we'll drink a health to Gladstone—to Gladstone, the great, pure democrat, the man of the present and the future."

"Wait a second, let us join in too!" cried his wife. And she poured wine in the ladies' glasses, poured over in her excitement, and offered the tray round with trembling hands.

They all drank.

"Ah, there's a man for you!" the Doctor went on, with a smack of the tongue. "Poor fellow, he's had a cold the last few days, but let's hope he's getting over it.

There's not one of the politicians I'd be so sorry to lose as Gladstone. My goodness, when I think of him he seems like a lighthouse shining out over the whole world! —You seem wool-gathering, Herr Nagel; don't you agree?"

"Beg pardon? Of course I entirely agree with you."

"Of course. Well, there are many things that impress me about Bismarck too—but Gladstone!"

Still nobody would oppose the Doctor; they were all used to his estimable chatter. Finally the conversation drooped so badly that the Doctor proposed cards to pass the time. Who would take a hand?

But at that moment Fru Stenersen called out from the other end of the room: "Well, I must say! Do you know what Herr Oien has just been telling me? Herr Nagel, you can't always have thought so well of Gladstone as you do this evening. Herr Oien once heard you speak in Christiania—was it in the Working Men's Club? —when you abused him properly. You're a nice one! Can you deny it? Ah, you'd better just try, you'd better just try!"

Fru Stenersen said this in good faith, with a smile on her lips, threatening him jestingly with her forefinger. She repeated her challenge.

Nagel started and replied that it must be a mistake.

"I won't say that you abused him," said Oien; "but you were in violent opposition. I remember for instance that you said Gladstone was a bigot."

"Bigot! Gladstone a bigot!" shrieked the Doctor. "Were you drunk, man?"

Nagel laughed.

"I'm sure I wasn't. Well, perhaps I was drunk, I don't know. It sounds like it."

"Well, I should say so!" said the Doctor, mollified.

Nagel refused to explain or say anything more, and Dagny Kielland again urged on the hostess: "Get him to tell us what he meant. It's such fun."

"Well, what did you mean exactly?" asked Fru Stenersen. "If you were against him, you must have meant something. Tell us what it was! You'll be doing us a kindness; if you men sit down to cards, it's *so* slow for us."

"If it will amuse the company that alters the case," replied Nagel.

Was this remark intended as a dig at himself and the part he had to play? He made a little grimace.

In the first place he didn't recollect the occasion Herr Oien referred to.—"Have any of you ever seen Gladstone and heard him speak? There's one impression you get of him as an orator—the man's open dealing, his immense honesty. It's as though there could never be any question about the genuineness of his wares. How could that man ever be capable of the great wickedness of sinning against God? And so penetrated is he with this idea of having clean hands that he assumes the same thing in his audience, positively assumes clean hands in his audience——"

"But isn't that a fine trait in his character? It shows his uprightness and humane disposition," interrupted the Doctor. "I never heard such stuff!"

"I quite agree; and I only mention it as distinguishing him, as a fine feature in his portrait. I will refer to an incident which happens to occur to me; well, perhaps I needn't tell the whole story, but only mention the name Carey. I don't know whether you all remember how Gladstone as Prime Minister made use of information from the traitor Carey? It's true he afterwards helped him away to Africa to escape the vengeance of the Fenians. However, that's not what we were talking about, that's another story; I don't attach any importance

to the kind of petty acts a Minister may be forced into once in a while. No, to come back to what we were talking about, it is a fact that Gladstone as a speaker has nothing but the most genuine goods to offer.—Now, you ought to have seen and heard Gladstone speak; then I should only have to call attention to the play of his features while speaking. He is so certain of the genuineness of his goods that his certainty is reflected in his look, his voice, his attitude, and his gestures. His words are simple and easy to understand, slow and everlasting; oh, how they go on and on! his stock never runs out. You should have seen how he deals out his remarks to all parts of the hall, a little to the ironmonger here, a little to the furrier over there, how he knows what he is talking about to such a point that he seems to price his words at a shilling apiece. I can assure you it's an amusing sight. You see, Gladstone is the champion of Indisputable Right; that is the cause for which he enters the lists. It would never occur to him to make the slightest concession to error. That is to say, knowing right to be on his side he is remorseless in using it, holding it up, raising it on high, letting it wave before his hearers' eyes, to put his opponents to shame. His morality is of the soundest and most durable kind; he works for Christianity, Humanity, and Civilization. If anybody offered that man so many thousand pounds to save an innocent woman from the scaffold, he would save the woman, refuse the money with scorn, and afterwards take no credit for it. None at all; he would *not* take credit for it; that's the sort of man he is. He is a tireless fighter, perpetually on the war-path to do good in this world, shouldering his burden daily for the right, the truth, and God. And what battles he wins! Two and two are four, truth has conquered, to God the honour!—Now Gladstone can rise higher than two and two; I have heard him prove in a

budget debate that seventeen times twenty-three are three hundred and ninety-one, and his victory was crushing, stupendous; he was right again, and the right shone in his eyes, quivered in his voice, and exalted him to greatness. But at that I actually stood up to look at the man. I guessed that he had the genuine goods, but I stood up all the same. I stood there reckoning up his three hundred and ninety-one and I found it was right, but in spite of that I turned it over once or twice and said to myself: No, stop! seventeen times twenty-three are three hundred and ninety-*seven!* I knew very well it was ninety-one, but still I said ninety-seven against my better knowledge so as not to be on the same side as this person, this professional right man. A voice within me insisted: Arise, arise against this stark staring rightness! And I arose and said ninety-seven from sheer burning inner necessity, to preserve my consciousness of right from being crushed into banality by this man who stood so indisputably on the side of right.—"

"God help me, I never heard such nonsense!" shouted the Doctor. "Does it scandalize you that Gladstone is always right?"

Nagel smiled—whether from mildness or affectation was hard to say. He resumed: "It does not scandalize me; it doesn't demoralize me either. Well, I don't much count on people's following me in this, but that's all one. Gladstone is that kind of knight-errant of right and truth; his brain is stiff with universally admitted results. That two and two are four is to him the greatest truth under the sun. And shall we deny that two and two are four? Of course not; I only say it to show that Gladstone is eternally right. So the only thing is whether one is sufficiently mad on truth to put up with it, whether one's perceptions have reached such a leathery degree of toughness that one can stand up to be pole-axed by a truth like

this. That is the point.—However, to such an extent is Gladstone right and so genuine are the goods he carries that you may be sure he'll never voluntarily give up his good works in this world. He must always be on the go; he is wanted everywhere. So he dins his wisdom into the ears of Birmingham and the same over again in Glasgow; he converts a cork-cutter and a barrister to the same political opinions, fights tooth and nail for his convictions, and strains his staunch old lungs to the utmost lest his hearers should lose a single one of his precious words. And when the act is over and the people have cheered and Gladstone has made his bow, he goes home to bed and clasps his hands and says his prayers and falls asleep without the smallest suspicion in his soul, without the slightest shame at having filled up Birmingham and Glasgow—with what? His only feeling is that he's done his duty towards men and done himself justice, and so he sleeps the sleep of the just. He would not be sinful enough to say to himself: To-day you did it rather badly; you bored those two cotton-spinners in the front row; you made one of them yawn—he wouldn't say that to himself, because he's not sure that it's true. And he will not tell a lie, for lying is sin and Gladstone will not sin. No, he would say: It seemed to me there was a man who yawned; it appeared to me, strangely enough, that he was yawning; but I must have been mistaken; the man can't have yawned at all.—I don't know whether it was something of this sort I said in Christiania, but it doesn't matter. In any case I confess that Gladstone's intellectual greatness has never made any very overpowering impression on me."

"Poor Gladstone!" said Reinert.

To that Nagel made no reply.

"No, that wasn't what you said in Christiania," Oien explained. "You went for Gladstone about his relations

with the Irish and Parnell, and amongst other things you said he could not be ranked as a very distinguished intellect. I remember your saying that. He was a great and serviceable force, you said, but a force that was after all extremely ordinary in its nature—a monstrous little finger of Beaconsfield."

"I remember that; they put me out for it. Good, I'll back that too; why not? I shan't be making things any worse. But let me off lightly!"

Then said Doctor Stenersen: "Tell me—are you a *Conservative?*"

Nagel opened his eyes in astonishment; then he burst out laughing and answered: "Well, what did you think?"

At that moment there was a ring at the surgery door. Fru Stenersen jumped up: of course, it was always like this; the Doctor would be called out again. But nobody else must go yet, certainly not—not before twelve anyhow. Fröken Andresen must simply sit down again; Anna was to bring more hot water, lots of hot water. It was only ten o'clock.

"Herr Reinert, you're not drinking anything."

Oh, yes, Reinert was looking after himself.

"Well, but you're not to break up the party yet. You must all stay. Dagny, you're very quiet."

No, Dagny was no quieter than usual.

The doctor came in from the surgery. They would have to excuse him; dangerous case, hæmorrhage. Well, it wasn't so far off but that he'd be back in two or three hours; hoped to find the company still there. Good-bye, everybody, good-bye Jetta.

And the Doctor bustled out. A minute later they saw him and another man spurting down the road to the quay, such was their hurry.

His wife said: "Now let's think of something.—Ugh, I can tell you I've often found it pretty dull to be left

alone here when my husband has to go out—winter nights especially, when I can't even be sure that he'll get back."

"You have no children, I see," said Nagel.

"No, no children.—Well, I'm getting used to the long nights now, but at first it was horrid. I assure you I felt so scared and worried and afraid of the dark—yes, I'm afraid of the dark too, worse luck—that sometimes I had to get up and go and sleep with the maid.—Now it's your turn to say something, Dagny! What are you thinking about? Your sweetheart, of course."

Dagny turned red, laughed in her confusion and replied: "Yes, of course I'm thinking of him; what do you expect? But why don't you ask Herr Reinert what he's thinking about? he hasn't said a word all the evening."

Reinert protested; he had been chatting with Fröken Olsen and Fröken Andresen; he had, so to speak, displayed considerable activity in a quiet way, had kept awake all the time, followed the others' political discussions, in short——

"I must tell you Fröken Kielland's *fiancé* has just gone to sea again," said the hostess to Nagel. "He's a naval officer; he's gone to Malta—wasn't it Malta?"

"Yes, to Malta," replied Dagny.

"Ah, it doesn't take a man like that long to get engaged! He dashes home for two or three weeks and then one evening—ah, these lieutenants!"

Fine fellows, Nagel declared. Handsome, weather-beaten men as a rule, with a breezy way and a frank look. He liked their uniform too and they showed it off well. Oh yes, he had always had a weakness for naval officers.

At this Fröken Kielland turned to Oien and asked him with a smile: "Yes, that's what Herr Nagel says here. But what did he say in Christiania?"

Everybody laughed; Lawyer Hansen called out tipsily:

"Ah, what did he say in Christiania—in Christiania? What did Herr Nagel say there? My goodness! Here's luck!"

Nagel clinked glasses with him and drank. It was a fact, he had always been gone on naval officers. He'd go so far as to say that if he was a girl he'd take a naval officer, or if there was none to be had he'd do without a husband.

This raised another laugh; Hansen in his enthusiasm clinked all the glasses he could see on the table and drank. But Dagny said abruptly: "They always say lieutenants haven't any brains. Then you don't think so?"

Nonsense! But even if it were so, he'd still prefer a handsome man to a clever one, if he was a girl. No question about it! Especially if he was a *young* girl. What could you do with a brain without a body? But—you might ask—what could you do with a body without a brain? Oh, but there was a deuce of a difference. Shakspere's parents couldn't read. For that matter it looked as if Shakspere himself couldn't read very well, but all the same he had become a historical figure. But be that as it might, a girl would get tired of an ugly scholar quicker than of a good-looking dunce. No, if he were a young girl and had the choice, he'd go for a handsome man. And the man's opinions on Norwegian politics and Nietzsche's philosophy and the doctrine of the Trinity he'd leave to the crows.

"Now I'll show you Fröken Kielland's lieutenant," said Fru Stenersen, fetching an album.

Dagny jumped up. An "Oh no!" escaped her, but then she sat down again. "Yes, but it's a bad portrait," she said; "he looks much better than that."

Nagel saw a handsome young man with a beard, sitting with easy dignity at a table with his hand on his

sword. His rather thin hair was parted in the middle; there was something English in his appearance.

"Yes, that's quite true; he's much, much nicer than this," Fru Stenersen agreed. "I was in love with him once myself in my unmarried days.—And now look at this man next him. That's a young theological student who died the other day, Karlsen; his name was Karlsen. He died a week or two ago, a very sad thing. What? Yes, yes, it was his funeral the day before yesterday."

The portrait showed a morbid-looking creature with hollow cheeks and lips so thin and compressed that they looked like a simple stroke on his face. The eyes were large and dark, the forehead unusually high and clear; but his chest was flat and his shoulders no broader than a woman's.

So that was Karlsen; that was how he looked. Nagel thought to himself that blue hands and theology would go with a face like that. He was just going to remark that it was not a cheerful face when he noticed that Reinert moved his chair close to Dagny's and began to talk to her. So he refrained from disturbing them and busied himself with the album.

"As you have been complaining of my silence," said Reinert, "perhaps you'll let me tell you of an incident of the Kaiser's visit, a perfectly true story. I just happened to think of it——"

She interrupted him and said in a low voice: "What have you been gossiping about all the time over in your corner? I'd rather hear that. You know I only wanted to give you a hint when I said you were so silent. Of course it was something spiteful, as usual. It's really horrid of you to be always laughing at people and taking them off. I know it's very ridiculous the way he shows off that iron ring on his little finger, holding it up and

looking at it and giving it a rub; but I dare say it's only absent-mindedness. At any rate he didn't make such a fool of himself as you made out. I must say though that he's so stuck-up and half crazy that he deserves it. But you, Gudrun, you went too far when you laughed at him. I'm perfectly certain he noticed you."

Gudrun came closer and defended herself, asserting that it was entirely Reinert's fault, he was so comic, irresistible. Just to hear him say: Gladstone's greatness has never impressed me—*me!*

"Hush, you're talking too loud again, Gudrun. He heard you; yes, he did; he turned round. But now, did you notice—when he was interrupted, he never lost his temper, did he? He gave us all a sort of mournful look. Do you know, I begin to feel ashamed of sitting here gossiping about him. Do tell us your story of the Kaiser's visit, Herr Reinert."

Reinert told it. As there was no secret in it, a perfectly innocent anecdote about a woman and a bouquet, he raised his voice by degrees, till at last the whole company was listening to him. The story was a circumstantial one and took several minutes.

When it was finished, Fröken Andresen said: "Herr Nagel, you remember yesterday evening, your story about the choral society in the Mediterranean——?"

Nagel closed the album with a bang and raised his eyes with a look almost of alarm. Was it acting or genuine? He answered quietly that he might have been mistaken in some of the details, but not intentionally; he had not made up the story, it had really happened.

"Dear me no, I never meant to say you *had* made it up," she replied with a laugh. "But do you remember what you said when I told you I thought it lovely. That you had only once heard anything more beautiful, and that was in a dream."

Yes, he remembered, he said with a nod.

"Then won't you tell us your dream too? Yes, do. You tell a story so wonderfully. We all ask you to."

But now he refused. He offered many excuses, said it was only a trivial thing, a dream without beginning or end, the whiff of an idea that had come during sleep. No, it couldn't even be put into words; they all knew these vague, floating fancies that one felt only like a ray of light and that vanished again at once. They could guess how stupid the whole thing was when he told them that the dream took place in a white forest of silver.—

Indeed—a forest of silver. What then?

No. He shook his head.

He'd be so glad to do all sorts of things for her, let her just put him to the proof. But he could not tell that dream; she must believe what he said.

"Very well, something else then. We all ask you."

He didn't feel up to it, not this evening. They must excuse him.

Then followed a little careless talk, childish questions and answers, sheer nonsense. Dagny said:

"You say you could do all sorts of things for Fröken Andresen; let's hear what you could do."

There was a laugh at this challenge, and Dagny joined in it. After a moment's consideration Nagel said: "For *you* I could do something bad."

"Something bad for me. Let's hear it. A murder, for instance?"

"Oh yes. I could murder an Eskimo and flay him to make a blotter for you."

"There, you see! But what about Fröken Andresen, what could you do for her? Something frightfully good?"

"Well, perhaps I could, I don't know. By the way, that about the Eskimo I've read somewhere. You mustn't think it's original."

Pause.

"You're a wonderfully kind set of people," he said. "You insist on letting *me* have my little say all the time; just because I'm a stranger."

The schoolmaster stole a look at his watch.

"You may as well know it," said the hostess; "you won't be allowed to go before my husband comes back. Strictly forbidden. Do anything you like, but you can't go."

Coffee came in, and at once the party became more lively. Lawyer Hansen, who had been arguing with the young student, jumped up, light as a feather for all his fat, and clapped his hands with delight; even Oien rubbed his fingers and went to the piano and struck a few chords.

"Oh yes," cried the hostess, "how could we forget that you played! Do go on, please do!"

Oien was only too glad. He couldn't play much, but if they didn't mind a little Chopin, or perhaps a waltz of Lanner——

Nagel applauded the music vigorously and said to Dagny: "Don't you feel when you hear that kind of music that you'd like to sit a little way off, in the next room, say, with your lover's hand in yours, without speaking a word? I don't know, but I've always imagined it must be so lovely."

She took a good look at him: did he mean this balderdash? There was no irony in his face, so she fell in with the same commonplace tone: "Yes; but you wouldn't want too much light, what? And the chairs ought to be rather low and soft. And it would have to be dark and wet outside."

She looked extraordinarily well this evening. Those dark eyes against her fair complexion were very effective. Though her teeth were not absolutely white, she was very ready to laugh; she would laugh at nothing at

all; and then one could not help noticing how red and full her lips were. But perhaps the strangest thing about her was that regularly, every time she spoke, a blush spread over her cheeks and vanished again in an instant.

"There! now the schoolmaster's stolen off again," cried the doctor's wife. "Of course! It's no use watching that man, he's always the same. I hope at any rate that you, Herr Reinert, will say good-night before you go."

The schoolmaster had gone out by the back door, had slunk away quietly, as he always did, tired out with his potations, pale with want of sleep, and had not come back. On hearing this Nagel's expression underwent a sudden change. The idea struck him at once that he might venture to offer Dagny his escort through the wood in place of Holtan. And he did so without loss of time, beseeching her with his eyes and with his bowed head, and added finally: "And I promise to be good!"

She laughed and answered: "Thanks; if you promise that, it's all right."

Now he had only to wait for the doctor's return. At the prospect of this walk through the woods he grew livelier than before, talked about everything under the sun, made them all laugh, and was elaborately polite. He was so delighted, so full of joy, that he promised to take a look at Fru Stenersen's garden, as he was a sort of expert, and investigate the nature of the soil in the lower corner, where the currant bushes were tainted. Oh, he'd put a stop to the blight if he had to exorcize it with spells.

Did he practise magic too?

He dabbled in a little of everything. For instance, they could see that he wore a ring, a homely iron ring, but possessed of the most marvellous powers. Would they believe that to look at it? But if he lost that ring any evening at ten o'clock he'd have to find it again before

twelve or it would go badly with him. He had got it from an aged Greek, a shopkeeper in the Piræus. Of course he had done the man a service in return and had given him a bale of tobacco into the bargain.

But did he actually believe in it?

Yes, more or less. Honour bright, it had cured him one time.

The bark of a dog was heard in the direction of the sea. Fru Stenersen looked at the clock; yes, it was the Doctor, she knew the dog's bark. How splendid! twelve o'clock and he was back already. She rang for more coffee.

"So it's a very remarkable ring, is it, Herr Nagel? And you have a firm belief in it?"

Tolerably firm. That is, he had good reason for not being altogether sceptical. Well, wasn't it a matter of indifference what one believed in, provided that in one's inmost heart one believed in it? The ring had cured him of nerves, steadied him and given him strength.

Fru Stenersen laughed at first, and then began to oppose him hotly. No, she couldn't stand that sort of decadent nonsense—excuse her calling it that—and she felt sure Herr Nagel didn't mean what he said either. When one heard educated people say such things, what was one to expect of the masses? Where would it land us? And wouldn't the doctors have to put up their shutters?

Nagel defended himself. Surely one thing was almost as good as the other. The important thing was the patient's will-power, his faith and disposition. But the doctors need not put up their shutters either; they too had their congregation, their believers; they had the educated people, and the educated people were cured with mixtures, while the heretics, the masses, were cured with iron rings, burnt human bones, and mould from the church-

yard. Had we not seen instances of patients who recovered on plain water if you only persuaded them that it was some priceless remedy? How many cases of this sort had been known among morphinists, for example! It was on the strength of such remarkable experiences as these that the anti-doctrinaire was able to send medical science to the devil and proclaim his independence of a belief in it. However, they mustn't run away with the idea that he set up to be knowledgable in such matters; he was only a layman and had never studied them. And when all was said and done, he was in such good spirits for the moment that he didn't want to dash anyone else's. His hostess must really forgive him, everybody must forgive him.

He looked at the clock every minute and was already buttoning up his jacket.

In the middle of this talk the Doctor burst in. He was nervous and out of humour, greeted his guests with forced liveliness, and thanked them for staying. Well, of course, there was no holding the schoolmaster, peace be with him; but otherwise the party was complete. Ah well, it was a hard world!

He began to tell them about his trip, as he always did. His sour looks came from his disappointment with his patients, who had behaved like asses and idiots; he wished he could put them under arrest. What a house it was he had been to! The woman ill, the woman's father ill, the woman's son ill; and the smell! However, the rest of the family were all right and rosy-cheeked, the little children absolutely bursting with health. It was incomprehensible, fantastic; no, he could make nothing of it! There lay the old man, the woman's father, with a cut as big as that. So they'd sent for a wise woman with nostrums and she had stopped the bleeding, right enough; but what had she stopped it with? Revolting, criminal;

he couldn't tell them what it was, but the smell—it was enough to kill you! Next thing, of course, mortification! Ah, if he hadn't been sent for this evening, God Almighty knows what would have happened! They ought to strengthen the law against quackery; that's what they'd have to do, and teach these people.—"Anyhow, the bleeding was checked. But then there's the son, a grown-up son, a lanky swine who'd gone and got an eruption all over his face. I gave him ointment the other day and told him particularly, use this yellow ointment for one—*one*—hour a day and this white ointment, zinc ointment, the rest of the time. What does he do? Of course he takes the wrong ointment, uses the white one for an hour and the yellow one, which draws and burns like hell, all day and all night. He keeps on at this for a fortnight. But the remarkable thing about it is that the fellow recovered, recovered in spite of his idiocy; he got well! The lout, the bullcalf, he gets well no matter what the devil he takes! He shows me this evening a cheek and a snout without a spot on them. Sheer fluke! The man ought to have scarified his face for months to come, but do you think he turned a hair?—Then there's this lad's mother, the woman of the house. She's ill, weak, debilitated, nervous, bad appetite, giddiness, singing in her ears. Baths! I tell her, baths! Wash yourself and get some water on your body, damn it! Kill a calf and eat a little meat; open your windows and get a little air; don't go in wet clothes; stay out of doors; throw away that book there, Johann Arndt; throw it on the fire—and so on; but above all baths and rubbing and again baths, or else my medicine won't help you.—Well, the calf she couldn't afford, and I dare say that's true; but she bathes, she bathes, she gets a little of the dirt off, and it makes her feel the cold; she shivers, her teeth chatter with all

this cleanliness, and so she stops it. No, she couldn't stand being clean any longer! What then? Why, she gets hold of a chain, a galvanic chain, Volta cross or whatever they call it, and hangs that on herself. I ask her to show me the thing: a zinc plate, a rag, a couple of hooks, a couple of smaller hooks—that's all there is to it. 'What the devil do you use this for?' I ask her. Oh, but it had done her some good, really done her some good; it had taken away the pains in her head, brought back a little warmth. Oh yes, these hooks and this zinc plate had cured her! What are you to do with a case like that? I might spit on a stick and give it to her and it would do her precisely as much good; but tell her that! Take it off, I say, or I won't do anything for you, I won't touch you. And what do you think she does? She sticks to her zinc plate and lets me go! Lets me go! Good God! No; one oughtn't to be a doctor, one ought to be a medicine man.—"

The Doctor sat down to his coffee in a very excited state. His wife exchanged a glance with Nagel and said with a laugh: "Herr Nagel would have done exactly the same as the woman. We were just talking about it when you came in. Herr Nagel doesn't believe in your science!"

"Oh, Herr Nagel doesn't?" the Doctor remarked curtly. "All right, Herr Nagel must please himself."

Vexed, hurt, full of annoyance with these bad patients who ignored his prescriptions, the Doctor drank his coffee in silence. It made him worse to feel that they all sat looking at him. "Get something to do; don't sit still," he said. But after the coffee he was cheerful again, talked to Dagny, and made fun of his rower, the man who had fetched him to the patients; then he returned to his professional worries and flared up once more. He

couldn't get over that mistake with the ointments; it was nothing but blockishness and superstition and asininity wherever he went. The ignorance among the common people was altogether appalling.

"Yes, but the man got well, didn't he?"

The Doctor could have planted his teeth in Dagny when she said this. He sat up. The man got well, yes; but what of that? It didn't interfere with the fact that the stupidity of the common people was scandalous. The man got well, yes, he did; but what if the man had flayed his chaps off? Did she want to defend his doltishness?

This humiliating encounter with a bumpkin who had gone dead against his prescriptions and yet cured himself irritated the Doctor beyond everything and made his usually benevolent eyes flash wildly behind his spectacles. He had been imposed upon by the cunningest of flukes, given the go-by for a zinc plate, and he didn't forget it till he had drunk a strong glass of toddy on top of the coffee. Then he said abruptly: "Look here, Jetta, I gave the man who fetched me five crowns; now I've told you. I never saw such a fellow; the whole seat of his trousers was gone, but what did he care? The man was all muscle, a regular devil; he sang the whole way out. He firmly believed he could reach heaven with a fishing-rod if he stood on the top of Etje Fell. 'You'd have to stand on tiptoe then,' said I. But he didn't see that, he took it seriously and swore he could stand on tiptoe as well as anybody. Did you ever hear the like? But he did amuse me."

At last Fröken Andresen got up to go and then everybody made a move. As he said good night, Nagel was so warm and sincere in his thanks that he completely disarmed the Doctor, who had been rather sour with him

the last quarter of an hour. "Come again soon! Look here, have you got a cigar? Do light a cigar." And the Doctor forced him to take another cigar.

Meanwhile Dagny was waiting on the door-step with her things on.

VIII

Light Nights

IT was a fine night.

The few people still to be seen in the streets had a cheerful air; in the churchyard a belated man was wheeling a barrow and singing to himself. Such was the stillness that nothing was heard but his song. From the height where the Doctor's house stood the town looked like a strange, branching, giant insect, a fabulous creature that had thrown itself flat on its belly and stretched out arms and horns and feelers in all directions; only here and there it moved a joint or drew in a claw—as down on the water, where a tiny steam launch was gliding noiselessly across the bay, drawing a furrow on the black surface.

The blue smoke of Nagel's cigar rose straight up. He was already drinking in the scent of the woods and the grass and was penetrated with a sense of contentment; a strange and powerful joy brought the tears to his eyes and almost took his breath away. He walked by Dagny's side; she had not yet opened her mouth. On passing the churchyard he had said a few words in praise of the Doctor and his wife, but she had made no answer. And now the stillness and beauty of the night had filled him with such elation, such impassioned feeling, that his breathing became short and his eyes misty. Ah, what loveliness there was in these light nights! He said, raising his voice: "Just look at the hills over there, how clear they are! I am so happy, Fröken, you must bear with me if you don't mind, but to-night I could do silly things from sheer happiness. Do you see these firs and

rocks and tussocks and juniper clumps? they look like seated figures in this light. And the night is cool and clean; it doesn't oppress one with queer forebodings and there are no secret dangers lurking anywhere, are there? Now you mustn't take a dislike to me, you really mustn't. It's just as though angels were passing through my soul, singing a hymn. Am I frightening you?"

She had stopped and that made him ask if he had frightened her. She turned her blue eyes on him with a smile, became serious again and said: "I have been trying to make out what kind of man you can be."

As she said this she stood still and looked at him. During the whole of their walk she spoke in a clear voice with a tremor in it, as though she were rather afraid and rather happy.

Then the following conversation took place between them, a conversation which lasted the whole way through the wood, late as it was, and which flew from one subject to another, from one mood to another, with all the mobility of the agitation that possessed them both.

"Have you thought about me? Really? But I'm sure I've thought much, much more about you. I knew about you even before I came here; I heard your name on board the steamer, by pure chance; I overheard some people talking. And I landed here on the 12th of June. The 12th of June——"

"Did you? The 12th of June of all days!"

"Yes. And the town was gay with flags and I thought it such an adorable little town; that's what made me land here. And as soon as I landed, I heard more about you——"

She smiled and asked: "Yes, I suppose it was from Minutten you heard it?"

"No. I heard that everybody, the whole town loved you, and everybody admired you——" And Nagel sud-

denly called to mind Karlsen, the theological student, who had even taken his life for her sake.

"Tell me," she said; "I suppose you meant what you said about naval officers?"

"Yes? Why do you ask?"

"Because in that case we agree."

"Why shouldn't I have meant it? I think a lot of them and always have; I admire the freedom of their life, their uniform, their breeziness and intrepidity; besides, most of them are uncommonly pleasant men."

"Now let's talk about yourself. What's the trouble between you and Herr Reinert?"

"Nothing. Herr Reinert, you say?"

"Yesterday evening you begged his pardon for something, and all this evening you've scarcely spoken to him. Are you in the habit of offending people and making excuses afterwards?"

He laughed and looked at the ground.

"The truth is," he replied, "it was very wrong of me to offend Herr Reinert. But I am perfectly certain I can put it right again when once I have a talk with him. I'm rather hasty, rather downright; the whole thing started by his pushing against me going through a door. A trifle, you see, an inadvertence on his part; but I jumped up at once like a lunatic and called him one or two names, shook a beer mug in his face, and punched his hat in. Then he went out; as a gentleman he could do nothing else. But afterwards I regretted my behaviour and I've made up my mind to put things right. Of course, there was something to be said on my side too; I was nervous that day and had one or two things to annoy me. But nobody knows anything about that, one can't tell people these things; and so I prefer to take all the blame."

He spoke offhand, in perfect sincerity, as though desirous of doing justice to both parties; nor did his ex-

pression betray any trickery. But Dagny stopped short, looked him in the face with astonishment and said: "Oh, but—that wasn't the way of it? I heard quite a different story."

"Minutten's a liar!" cried Nagel, flushing.

"Minutten? I never heard it from Minutten. What makes you slander yourself like this? I heard it from a man in the market-place, the man with the plaster figures; he told me the whole thing. He saw it from beginning to end."

Pause.

"What makes you slander yourself? I can't make it out," she continued, looking at him the whole time. "I heard the story to-day and it made me so happy; I mean to say, I thought you had acted so uncommonly finely, in such a handsome way. It suited you so. If I hadn't heard that story this morning, I don't know that I should have ventured to walk with you now. I tell you that frankly."

Pause.

Then he said: "And now you admire me for this?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"Oh yes, now you admire me.—Look here," he went on, "all this is nothing but play-acting. You're an honest person and I hate deceiving you; I'll tell you all the ins and outs of it."

And he proceeded to explain, impudently, with his eyes open, how he had calculated the whole thing: "In giving you my own account of this encounter with Reinert, twisting the facts a trifle, a slandering myself a little even, my real motive is nothing but pure speculation. I'm trying to draw all the profit I can from the affair. You see I am honest with you. It's because I take for granted that in any case somebody or other will one day tell you the real facts, and then, having already blackened

myself as much as possible in your eyes, I shall profit by it, reap an immense reward. I acquire a halo of greatness, of magnanimity, which you don't see every day—isn't that so?—but I achieve this by no other means than a deception so low, so vulgar, that it disgusts you to hear of it. I have thought it right to make you this open confession because you deserve frankness. But naturally all I shall gain by it will be to drive you a thousand miles away from me, more's the pity."

She still kept her eyes on him, puzzled by this man and his talk, turning it over and trying to form an opinion. What was she to think? What was he aiming at with his frankness? Suddenly she stopped again, clapped her hands together, and broke into a loud, clear laugh.

"No, you're the most barefaced person I ever heard of! Fancy pouring out all these ugly confessions with a serious face, simply to damage yourself! But you're doing no good by it! I never heard of such a thing! How could you be sure I should ever find out the real facts? Tell me that. No, stop, don't tell me; it will only be another lie. Fie, how horrid it is of you! But listen: when you calculate that so and so will happen and make up your story and get what you want, why do you go and spoil it all afterwards by confessing your deceit—as you call it? You did something of the same sort yesterday evening. I can't make you out. But why do you calculate all the rest and forget to calculate that you're sure to give away your own fibs?"

He didn't give in, not a bit of it; after a moment's reflection he answered: "But I do calculate that too. You shall see for yourself. If I make a confession, as I am doing now, I actually risk nothing by it; I don't risk much. You see, in the first place it isn't certain that the person I confess to will believe me. You, for

instance, don't believe me at this moment. But what is the result of that? Why, the result is that I gain twice over, I gain enormously, my profits grow like an avalanche, my greatness soars mountain-high. Well, in the second place I should come out with a profit in any case, even if you believed me. You shake your head? No, don't do that; I assure you, I have used the same methods pretty often and always came off a winner. If you really believed my confession to be true, you would at any rate be knocked flat by my frankness. You would say: 'He has cheated me, true, but he tells me so afterwards, without the slightest necessity; his impudence is mystical; he shrinks from nothing at all; he positively bars my way with his admissions!' In short, I force you to stare at me; I stimulate your curiosity to pay attention to me; I stagger you. Now you said yourself not more than a minute ago: 'I can't make you out!' You see, you said that because you were trying to puzzle me out—a thing again which tickles me, which, I may say, is downright sweet to me. In any case I come off with my profit whether you believe me or not."

Pause.

"And you ask me to believe," she said, "that you have made all these cunning plans beforehand? You have foreseen every accident, provided against everything? Now I'll never again be surprised at anything you say; no, after this I shall expect the worst. But be that as it may, you're not a bad liar; you might have done it worse."

He stuck to his guns obstinately and declared that after this pronouncement on her part his magnanimity was established firm as a rock. And he would give her ever so many thanks, for now he had achieved his whole object. But it was far too kind of her, far too generous——

"All right," she interrupted; "that will do now."

But then it was his turn to stop short.

"I tell you once more that I have been fooling you!" he said, staring at her.

They looked at each other for a moment; her heart began to beat faster and she turned rather pale. What could it be that made him so anxious to get her to believe the worst of himself? Ready and willing as he was to give in on other points, on this he was not to be moved. What a mania it was, what a piece of absurdity! She exclaimed with irritation: "I can't imagine why you persist in showing me the seamy side of yourself. You know you promised to behave nicely."

Her vehemence was perfectly genuine. She was getting befogged by his positiveness, which was so firm, so unshakable, that it made her waver. She felt it as an outrage to be twisted round like this, and she showed her irritation by smacking her hand with her parasol as she walked.

He seemed very crestfallen and made several droll and disarming remarks about it. Finally she was forced to laugh again and gave him to understand that she didn't take him seriously. He was and always would be impossible. If he thought it funny, well and good. But not a word more about this fixed idea of his, not a word——

Pause.

"Do you remember," he said, "this is where I met you for the first time. Never shall I forget how fairy-like you were as you ran away. Like a sylph, a vision—— But now I'm going to tell you a fairy-tale that once happened to me."

It was only a trifling adventure, for that matter, and wouldn't take long to tell. He was sitting one night in his room—it was in a little town, it was not in Norway,

it didn't matter where it was—to be brief, he was sitting in his room one mild autumn evening. It was eight years ago, in 1883. He sat with his back to the door, reading a book.

"Had you a lamp?"

"Oh, yes, it was pitch-dark outside. I was sitting reading when I heard someone coming; I distinctly heard a step on the stairs and then a knock at my door. 'Come in!' Nobody came. I opened the door; nobody outside. There was positively no one standing outside. I rang for the maid. Had anyone come upstairs? No, no one had come upstairs. Very well, good-night! And the maid went out.

"I sat down again to my book. Then I felt a faint puff, as of a man's breath, and I heard a whisper, 'Come!' I look around; there is nobody there. I go on reading, get angry and say: 'Damn!' Then all at once I see beside me a pale little man with a red beard and stiff, dry hair standing on end; the man was standing at my left side. He winked one eye at me and I winked back; we had never seen one another before, but we winked at each other once or twice. Then I closed the book in my right hand; the man moved to the door and disappeared; I followed him with my eyes and saw him disappear. I got up and went to the door, and then again I heard the whisper, 'Come!' Good; I put on my coat, slipped my feet into goloshes, and went out. You'd better light a cigar, I thought; and I returned to my room and lit a cigar. I stuffed a few more cigars into my pocket; goodness knows why, but I did so, and went out again.

"It was dark as the grave and I could see nothing, but I felt that the little man was at my side. I swung my arms about to get hold of him and made up my mind to resist; I would come to a halt if he didn't tell me more

about himself; but he was not to be found. I then tried winking at him in various directions in the dark, but that was no use either. 'Good!' I said, 'I've not come out on your account, I've come on my own; I'm going for a walk; kindly note that I'm only going for a walk.' I spoke aloud, so that he might hear. I walked for several hours; I was out in the country, in a forest; I felt my face smacked by dew-drenched twigs and leaves. 'Well,' I said at last, pulling out my watch as though to look at it, 'well, now I'm going home again.' But I did not go home again; I was incapable of turning back; I was driven on and on. 'Only it's such glorious weather,' I said to myself, 'that you can keep on at this for a night or two; you have lots of time!' I said this though I was tired and wet through with the dew. And I lit another cigar and the little man was still at my side; I could feel his breath blowing on me. And I walked incessantly, walked in every possible direction, but never back to town. My feet began to hurt me; I was drenched to the knees with dew and my face was smarting from the wet branches that had grazed it. I said, 'It may seem rather strange of me to be walking here at this time of night, but it's a way I have, a lifelong habit of mine to discover the biggest forests and walk in them at night.' And I went on with clenched teeth. Presently the church clock in the town struck twelve; one, two, three, four, up to twelve; I counted the strokes. The familiar sound put new life into me, though I was annoyed that we had come no farther from town after all our tramping. Good; but the church clock struck, and just at the twelfth stroke the little man again appeared before me in the flesh and laughed. I shall never forget it; he was so clearly alive; he had lost two front teeth and he kept his hands behind his back——"

"But how could you see him in the dark?"

"He gave a light of his own. He shone with a wonderful light that seemed to come from behind him and make him transparent; even his clothes were as bright as daylight; his trousers were shabby and far too short. I saw all this in a second. The sight struck me with astonishment; I closed my eyes involuntarily and took a half step backwards. When I looked again the man was gone—"

"Oh——!"

"There's more. I had come to the tower. There was a tower in front of me; I came upon it and saw it more and more clearly; a dark, octagonal tower, like the Tower of the Winds at Athens, if you have ever seen a picture of that. I had never heard of any tower in this forest, but there it was; I stood by this tower and again I heard: 'Come!' and I went in. The door stayed open behind me and that gave me a feeling of relief.

"Inside under the vaulting I met the little man again; a lamp was burning on one of the walls and I saw him well; he came towards me as though he had been in there the whole time, laughed silently in my face, and stood staring at me as he laughed. I looked into his eyes and thought they were full of many horrors that they had looked upon in life. He winked at me again and I didn't wink in return; I retreated backwards as he came nearer. Suddenly I heard a light step behind me; I turned my head and saw a young woman enter.

"Well, I looked at her and felt glad; she had red hair and black eyes, but she was poorly dressed and she walked the stone floor with bare feet. Her arms were bare and spotless.

"She watched us both for a moment, then bowed deeply to me and went up to the little man. Without a word she proceeded to unbutton his clothes and feel him about the body as though searching for something;

soon after, she brought out of the lining of his cloak a burning light, a little, fiercely shining lantern which she hung on her finger. The lantern gave such a glaring light that it completely outshone the lamp on the wall. The man stood perfectly still and laughed as silently as before while he was being searched. 'Good-night,' said the woman and pointed to a door; and the man, this strange, frightful, half-human thing, went out. I was left alone with the newcomer.

"She came towards me, made another low bow, and said, without a smile, without raising her voice: 'Where do you come from?'

" 'From town, fair maid,' I replied. 'I've come all the way from town.'

" 'Stranger, forgive my father!' she broke out. 'Don't do us any harm for this. He's ill; he's mad; you saw his eyes.'

" 'Yes. I saw his eyes,' I replied, 'and I felt they had power over me; I followed them.'

" 'Where did you meet him?' she asked.

"And I answered: 'At home, in my room. I was sitting reading when he came.'

"Then she shook her head and dropped her eyes.

" 'But don't let that sadden you, fair child,' I said; 'I was glad of the walk; I missed nothing by it and don't regret having met you. Look at me, I'm happy and contented, and you must smile too!'

"But she did not smile; she said: 'Take off your shoes. You must not leave here to-night. I will dry your clothes.'

"I looked down at my clothes, which were soaking; my shoes were pouring water. I did as she told me, took off my shoes and gave them to her. But when I had done that, she blew out the lamp and said: 'Come!'

" 'Wait a moment,' I said, stopping her. 'If I'm not

to sleep here, why did you get me to take my shoes off at once?'

"'I shall not tell you that,' she replied. "And she did not tell me. She led me through the door, into a dark room; there was a sound as though someone was sniffing after us; I felt a soft hand on my mouth, and the girl said aloud: 'It is I, Father. The stranger is gone —he's gone.'

"But once more I heard the deformed madman scenting us. We went up some stairs; she held my hand and neither of us spoke. We entered another vaulted chamber, where not a ray of light was to be seen, black night everywhere.

"'Quiet!' she whispered. 'Here is my bed.'

"And I felt for the bed and found it.

"'Now take off the rest of your clothes,' she whispered again.

"I took them off and gave them to her.

"'Good-night," she said.

"I held her back and asked her to stay: 'Stop a moment, don't go. Now I know why you made me take off my shoes downstairs; I'll be ever so quiet; your father hasn't heard me—come!'

"But she did not come.

"'Good-night,' she said again and went out—"

Pause. Dagny was blushing deeply, her bosom rose and sank rapidly, her nostrils quivered. She asked quickly: "Did she go?"

Pause.

"Now a change comes over my night and it becomes a fairy-tale, a roseate memory. Imagine a light, light night.—I was alone; the darkness surrounding me was thick and heavy as velvet. I was tired, my knees shook, I was also rather dazed. That villain of a lunatic had taken me round and round for several hours in the wet

grass, led me like a dumb beast, and all with his eyes and his 'Come, come!' Next time I'll snatch his lantern from him and bash him on the jaw with it! I was badly annoyed, lit a cigar in my wrath, and went to bed. I lay for a while watching the glow of my cigar; then I heard the door slammed down below, and all was still.

"Ten minutes passed. Now note this: I was lying in bed wide awake and smoking a cigar. All of a sudden the vaulting was filled with a murmur as though a lot of ventilators had been opened all over the roof. I raised myself on my elbow and let my cigar go out, stared about me in the dark, and could discover nothing. I lay down again and listened, and then I seemed to hear distant sounds, a wonderful music of a thousand voices somewhere outside me, high up under the sky perhaps, but soft and thousand-voiced. This music went on continually, coming nearer and nearer, and at last it surged just above me, above the roof of the tower. I raised myself on my elbow again. Then I witnessed a thing which fills me even to-day with a strange, supernatural rapture when I think of it: a stream of tiny, dazzling creatures broke in upon me, perfectly white; they were angels, myriads of tiny angels, pouring down from above like a leaning wall of light. They filled the vault; there were perhaps a million of them; they floated in waves from floor to ceiling and they sang, and they were perfectly naked and white. My heart stood still; there were angels everywhere; I listened and heard their singing; they brushed my eyelids and caught in my hair, and the whole vaulting was filled with perfume from their little, open mouths.

"I lay on my elbow and stretched out my hand to them, and then some settled on it; I seemed to have the twinkling Pleiads in my hand. But I bend forward and looked into their eyes and I saw that these eyes were blind. I

released the seven blind ones and caught seven more, and these too were blind. Alas, they were all blind—the whole tower was full of blind angels who sang.

"I did not move; it almost took away my breath when I saw this, and a pang of melancholy went through my soul for these blind eyes.

"A minute went by. I lay listening and I heard a harsh and heavy stroke somewhere a long way off; I heard it with such cruel distinctness, it rumbled a long time after: it was the church clock in town striking again. It struck one.

"And immediately the angel's song ceased. I saw them form again and fly away; they swarmed up to the roof, crowding to get away, like a leaning wall of sheer light, and they all looked at me as they went away. The last one turned and looked at me once more with its blind eyes before it vanished.

"That is the last thing I remember—that last angel that turned and looked at me although it was blind. Then all was dark. I fell back on the bed and slept—

"When I awoke it was broad daylight. I was still alone in the vaulted chamber. My clothes lay on the floor beside me. I felt them; they were still rather wet, but I put them on in spite of it. Then the door opened and the girl of the evening before appeared.

"She came right up to me and I said: 'Where have you come from? Where were you last night?'

" 'Up there,' she replied, pointing to the roof of the tower.

" 'Haven't you slept?'

" 'No, I haven't slept. I was watching.'

" 'But didn't you hear music in the night?' I asked. 'I heard a music beyond description.'

"And she answered: 'Oh, it was I who was playing and singing.'

"'Was it you? Tell me, child, was it you?'

"'It was I.'

"She gave me her hand and said: 'But come now, I will show you the way.'

"And we left the tower and went hand in hand into the forest. The sun shone on her golden hair, and her black eyes were glorious. I took her in my arms and kissed her twice on the forehead; then I fell on my knees before her. She took a black ribbon from her dress with trembling hands and tied it on my wrist; but as she did so she wept with emotion. I asked: 'Why do you weep? Forgive me if I have hurt you.'

"But she only answered: 'Can you see the town?'

"'No,' I replied, 'I can't see the town. Can you?'

"'Get up and let us go on,' she said. And she led me again.

"Once more I stopped and clasped her to me and said: 'What happiness you give me! how you make me love you!'

"And she trembled in my arms, but still she said: 'Now I must turn back. You can see the town now?'

"'Yes,' I replied; 'so can you, can't you?'

"'No,' was her answer.

"'Why not?' I asked.

"She withdrew from me and looked at me with her great eyes, and as she left me, she took her leave with a low bow. When she had gone a few paces, she turned once more and looked at me.

"And then I saw that her eyes too were blind—

"Now comes a period of twelve hours of which I can give no account; it is gone from me. I don't know what has become of it, but I've rapped at my skull and said: 'It's twelve hours that are wanted; they must be in here somewhere; they've only got mislaid and I must find them.' But I haven't found them—

"Again it is evening, a dark, mild, autumn evening. I am sitting in my room holding a book in my hand. I look down at my legs; they are still rather wet; I look at my wrist and there is a bit of black ribbon tied round it. Everything is in order.

"I ring for the maid and ask if there is a tower in the neighbourhood, somewhere in the forest, a dark, octagonal tower.—The maid nods and says: 'Yes, there is a tower.'—'And does anyone live in it?—'Yes, there's a man living there; but he's ill; he's possessed; they call him Jack o' Lantern. And Jack o' Lantern has a daughter who lives with him in the tower; nobody lives there but those two.'—'Very well; good-night!'

"Then I go to bed.

"Early next morning I make for the forest. I follow the same path and see the same trees and I find the tower as before. As I go up to the door, I see a sight that makes my heart stand still—on the ground lies the mangled body of the blind girl, killed by a fall. There she lay with her mouth open, and the sun shone on her red hair. And up on the verge of the roof still fluttered a shred of her dress, which had caught there; but on the path below walked the little man, the father, looking at the corpse. His chest was wrung with spasms and he howled aloud; but he had no idea of doing anything, he could only go round and round the corpse and look at it and howl. When he caught sight of me, I shuddered at his horrible eyes and fled in terror back to the town. And I never saw him again.—

"That was my fairy-tale."

There was a long silence. Dagny kept her eyes on the ground, walking with extraordinary lightness. At last she said: "Heavens, what a strange story!"

Then another silence ensued and Nagel tried once or twice to break it with a remark about the deep peace of

the woods. "Do you notice the scent of the wood just here? Do let us sit down a minute!"

She sat down, still silent, still thoughtful, and he sat facing her.

He felt it was his duty to cheer her with his talk. It wasn't such a sad story after all; it was a jolly adventure. Pooh! why, in India—in India the fairy-tales were something very different; they took your breath away and froze you with horror. There were two kinds of Indian fairy-tale: the supernaturally gorgeous ones about diamond caves, princes from the mountains, enticing beauties from the sea, spirits of the earth and air, palaces of pearl, castles beyond the sunset, flying horses, forests of silver and gold. Other tales had a partiality for the mystical, the grand and strange and marvellous; in fact the Orientals had no rivals in hatching out colossal delusions, the monstrous visions of fevered brains. Their lives were passed in a fantastic world from the very beginning and it was just as natural for them to talk of wild, fairy palaces beyond the mountains as of the mighty dumb Power in the sky, which potters about in space, chewing stars. But all this was the result of these people's living under a different sun and eating fruit instead of beefsteaks.

Dagny asked: "But haven't we some very good fairy-tales of our own?"

Wonderful tales. Only of a different sort. We had no idea of a sun that could shine and burn beyond all reason. Our pixy tales kept to the ground, kept underground; they were the offspring of a leather-breeched fancy, hatched out on dark, winter nights in log-cabins with smoke-holes in the roof. Had she ever read the Arabian Nights? These tales from Gudbrandsdal, this truly rustic poetry, this pedestrian fancy—this was our own; this was *our* genius. We didn't shudder at our

fairy-tales; they were cheerful and comic; we laughed at them. Our hero was no magnificent prince, but a cunning blockhead. What did she say? Ah yes, the Nordland tales, but wasn't it just the same with them? What had we been able to make of the ocean's raw and mystic loveliness? A Nordland fishing-smack in itself would be a fabulous boat, a phantom craft, to the Oriental. Had she ever seen one of these smacks? No? It looked as if it had sex, like a great she-animal, bulging with unborn young, and flat-bottomed, so that it could sit down. Its nose stuck out like a horn to summon the four winds of heaven.—No, we lived too far north. Well, that was only what an agronomist had to say in all modesty of a geographical phenomenon.

She must have grown tired of all his chatter; her blue eyes seemed to be laughing at him and she asked: "What's the time now?"

"The time?" he said absently; "the time must be one. The night's still young; it's no time at all."

Pause.

"How do you like Tolstoy?" she asked.

"I don't like him," he said, swallowing the bait whole. "I like *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* and——"

Then she asked with a smile: "And what is your opinion about universal peace?"

That was one for him. He lost countenance and didn't know what to say.

"What do you mean?—I see, I've been boring you to death."

"I assure you, it just occurred to me to ask," she said quickly, turning red. "You mustn't take it amiss. The fact is, we're getting up a bazaar, an evening entertainment, for the benefit of the Defence Fund. That's what made me think of it."

Pause. All at once he looked at her, and his eyes were beaming.

"I'm in a happy mood this evening, I must tell you, and so perhaps my tongue's been wagging too freely. I'm happy about everything, above all because I'm out here with you; but another thing is that to-night seems the loveliest night I have ever known. I don't know how it is; I feel as if I were part of this wood and these fields, a branch of a fir-tree or a stone; yes, even a stone, I think, but a stone that was penetrated with all the fine scent and all the peace that surrounds us. Look over there, the dawn's coming; you can see a streak of silver."

They both looked at the silver streak.

"I am happy too to-night," she said.

And she said this without being forced to it, of her own free will, spontaneously, as though it were a pleasure to say it. Nagel observed her carefully and was set going again. Nervously, impulsively, he held forth about Midsummer Night: that the trees stood swaying and murmuring, swaying and murmuring, that the dawning day wrought a change in him, brought his heart under the control of other powers. As Grundtvig sang: As children of the light we feel that now the night is o'er!— But if he was talking too much he might show her a little trick instead, with a twig and a straw, to prove that the straw was stronger than the twig. He would do anything for her.—"Look here, let me point out the smallest thing that impresses me, that lonely juniper bush over there. It's positively bowing to us and it has a *kind* look. And the spider spins its web from tree to tree; they look like some curious kind of Chinese work, like suns, spun in water. You're not cold, are you? I'm sure there are warm, smiling elf maidens dancing about us at this moment; but still I'll light a fire if you're cold.—By the

way, it's just struck me—wasn't it hereabouts that Karlsen was found?"

Was this to pay her for the one she had given him? He looked capable of anything.

She flared up with a look of displeasure and said: "Let *him* be, if you please. I never heard such a thing!"

"I beg your pardon," he said at once, giving way. "Only they say he was so gone on you—and I can't blame him for it.——"

"Gone on me? And don't they say he killed himself for my sake, with my penknife? No, now we must go on."

She got up. She had spoken in a faintly sad tone, without embarrassment and without affectation. He was extremely surprised. Here she was, conscious of having driven one of her admirers to his death, and she made nothing of it; she neither sneered at it nor on the other hand turned it to her own advantage; merely referred to it as a regrettable occurrence and left it at that. Her long, fair hair fell over the collar of her dress, and the colour in her cheeks was warm and fresh, tinged deeper by the dew. As she walked, her hips swayed very slightly.

They had left the trees and come into a clearing; a dog barked and Nagel said: "Here's the parsonage already. How cheerful and homelike it looks, these big white buildings and the garden and the dog-kennel and the flagstaff in the very depths of the forest. Don't you think, Fröken Kielland, that you'll long to be back here when you've left? I mean, when you're married? Well, of course it depends where you're going to live."

"I haven't thought about that yet," she replied. And she added: "Sufficient for the day——"

"Sufficient for the day is the joy thereof!" he said.

Pause. She seemed to be thinking over what he had said.

"Look here," she said, "you mustn't go thinking it strange that I should be out so late at night, will you? It's what we're used to here. You see, we're only country folk hereabouts, children of nature. Herr Holtan and I have often walked along this road chatting till broad daylight."

"Herr Holtan? He struck me as a man of very few words."

"Well, yes, I did most of the talking; that is, I asked questions and he answered them.—What will you do now when you get home?"

"Now?" replied Nagel. "When I get home? I shall go to bed and sleep till—well, till about midday, sleep like a stone, like the dead, without waking and without dreaming. What will you do?"

"Don't you do any thinking? Don't you lie awake thinking of all sorts of things? Do you get to sleep at once?"

"Instantly. Don't you?"

"Listen, there's a bird singing already. Why, it must be later than you said; will you let me see your watch? Good gracious, it's three o'clock, nearly four! What made you tell me just now it was only one?"

"Forgive me!" he replied.

She looked at him, but without a trace of displeasure, and said: "You need not have played this trick on me; I should have stayed out all the same; I'm telling you the truth. I hope you won't put more into it than you ought. I haven't many pleasures and I accept those I can get with both hands. That is what life has been, ever since we came here, and I don't think it has shocked anyone. Well, I'm not so sure of that, but anyhow it doesn't matter. At any rate Papa never says anything,

and he's the one I go by. Come along, we'll walk a little farther."

They walked past the parsonage and into the wood on the other side. The birds were singing; the white streak of daylight in the east grew broader and broader. Their conversation flagged and turned to commonplace things. Soon they stopped and came back to the parsonage gate.

"Yes, here I am, good dog!" she said to the yard dog, who was pulling at his chain. "Thanks for seeing me home, Herr Nagel; it's been a delightful evening. And now I shall have something to tell my *fiancé* when I write. I shall say that you're the sort of man who disagrees with everybody about everything; that will give him an awful shock. I can see him puzzling over the letter, not knowing what to make of it. You see, he's so extraordinarily good-natured, you can't conceive how kind he is. He never contradicts. It's a pity you won't meet him while you're here. Good-night."

And Nagel replied: "Good-night, good-night," following her with his eyes till she disappeared into the house.

Nagel took off his cap and carried it in his hand as he walked through the wood. He was extraordinarily preoccupied; several times he stopped and raised his eyes from the road, stared before him for a moment, and then went on with short, slow steps. What a voice, what a voice she had! Was ever anything like it? a voice that thrilled with music.

IX

NEXT day, about noon.

Nagel had just got up and had gone out without his breakfast. He had already walked some distance through the town, tempted by the brilliant weather and the busy life of the quays, when he turned abruptly to a man and asked the way to the Magistrate's office. The man told him and Nagel went there straight.

He knocked and entered, passed by a couple of clerks who were writing, and went up to the Deputy, Reinert, whom he asked for a private interview—he wouldn't keep him long. Reinert got up rather reluctantly and showed him into a private room.

Here Nagel said: "I must ask you to excuse my harking back once more to this affair. It's that business about Minutten, you know. I hereby offer you my humblest apology."

"I regard the affair as settled and done with after your apology the other evening before the whole company."

"There, that's extraordinarily nice of you," said Nagel. "But I'm not quite satisfied with that way of settling it, Herr Reinert. That is to say, I'm satisfied with it for my own part, but not for Minutten's. I should be extremely gratified if you would admit that Minutten too must have his redress and that you are the man to give it him."

"You think I ought to go and beg that ninny's pardon for a bit of skylarking? Is that what you think? Hadn't you better mind your own business and not——"

"Oh yes, yes, yes, we've heard all that before! But to return to the subject: you tore Minutten's coat to pieces and promised him a new one to replace it; do you remember that?"

"Now, I'll tell you something. You've come into a public office to jabber about a private matter which doesn't even concern you. This is *my* place. You needn't go back through the office; you can get into the street by this door."

And the Deputy opened the side door.

"Thanks. But, speaking seriously, you ought instantly to send off the coat you promised Minutten. He wants it, you know, and he trusted your word."

Reinert threw the door open and said: "This way out!"

"Minutten assumed you were an honest man," Nagel went on; "and you oughtn't to impose on him."

But now the Deputy opened the office door as well and called to the two clerks inside. Nagel therefore raised his cap and left at once. He said not a word more.

How unfortunately this piece of business had turned out! It would have been far better not to have attempted it. Nagel went home, had his lunch, read the papers, and played with the puppy, Jakobsen.

In the course of the afternoon, looking out of the window of his room, he saw Minutten carrying a sack up the rough graveled road from the quay. It was a sack of coal he was carrying. He walked with a terrible stoop and could not see where he was going, as his load weighed him down almost to the ground. He was so shaky on his feet and walked so crookedly that his trousers were worn to tatters on the inside. Nagel went to meet him and came upon him by the post office, where Minutten had put down his sack for a moment.

They greeted each other with a low bow. As Minutten

straightened himself, his left shoulder sagged deeply. Nagel gripped him by that shoulder and held it as, coming straight to the point, he said in great excitement: "Have you been blabbing to anyone about that money I gave you? Have you said anything to anybody at all?"

Minutten answered in astonishment: "No, that I haven't, not a word."

"Let me just inform you," said Nagel, pale with emotion, "that if you ever say a word about those few pence I'll kill you—kill you! By God in heaven! Do you understand? And let your uncle keep his mouth shut too."

Minutten stood with open mouth and stammered out a word here and there: he wouldn't say anything, not a word, he'd promise that, it was a promise——

As though to excuse his vehemence Nagel added at once: "This is a hole of a town, a rotten little hole! They stare after me wherever I go; I can't stir a foot. But I don't want this continual spying, and I don't give a damn for all these people. Now I've warned you. I may tell you I have good reason to think that this Fröken Kielland of the parsonage, for one, is a bit too sly at drawing you out and getting you to tell things. But I'm not going to have any of her inquisitiveness, hanged if I am! I met her yesterday evening, by the way. She's a great coquette. Well, that's neither here nor there. I will only ask you once more to keep your mouth shut about that little business of ours. By the way, it's a good thing I met you now," Nagel went on. "There's another thing I want to speak to you about. The day before yesterday we were sitting together on a tombstone up in the churchyard."

"Yes."

"I wrote a verse on the stone; I admit it was a bad verse and an objectionable one, but that has nothing to do

with it; I wrote a verse. When I left, the verse was there, but when I came back a few minutes later, it had been wiped out—was that your work?"

Minutten look at the ground and answered: "Yes."

Pause. Quite upset at being caught doing such an audacious thing on his own account, Minutten stuttered and tried to explain: "I wanted to prevent—— You didn't know Mina Meek; that was the whole trouble; otherwise you wouldn't have done it; you wouldn't have written that. And I said to myself at once: 'He must be excused; he's a stranger, and I'm at home here; it's easy for me to put it right, so why shouldn't I do it?' I wiped out the verse. Nobody had seen it."

"How do you know that nobody had seen it?"

"Not a soul had seen it. After I had followed you and Dr. Stenersen to the gate I went back at once and wiped it out. I wasn't away more than a couple of minutes."

Nagel looked at him, took his hand, and pressed it without a word. They looked at each other; Nagel's lips quivered a trifle.

"Good-bye," he said.—"By the by, have you got the coat?"

"H'm. But I'm sure to get it for the day I want it. In three weeks' time——"

At that moment the white-haired egg-woman, Martha Gude, came past with her basket under her apron and her black eyes cast down. Minutten bowed, Nagel bowed too, and she scarcely returned their greeting, went quickly by, hurrying to the market, where she delivered her two or three eggs and left again with her coppers in her hand. She had on a thin, green dress. Nagel did not take his eyes from this green dress. He said: "I see; in three weeks you will want the coat. What's going to happen in three weeks?"

"There's to be a bazaar, a big evening entertainment; haven't you heard? I'm to take part in the tableaux; Fröken Dagny has already engaged me."

"Really!" said Nagel reflectively. "Well, you'll have the coat in a day or two, a new coat in place of the old one. Herr Reinert told me so to-day. He's not so bad really, that man.—But listen, you must be sure and remember this—you're not to thank him, ever! Under no circumstances must you mention the coat to him; he won't have any thanks. Do you understand? He would be hurt, he said. Besides, you can see yourself that it would be tactless of you to remind him of the day he got drunk and left the hotel with his hat bashed in."

"Yes."

"You're not to say a word to your uncle either about the coat; not a soul is to know of it; Herr Reinert insists on that. You can understand of course that it would make him look very foolish if it got about that he was in the habit of taking liberties with all and sundry and then had to make it up to them with coats."

"Yes, I see that."

"Look here, it just occurs to me: why don't you use a barrow to take your coal round?"

"I can't do that because of my trouble; I'm no good at pulling. I can stand a lot of weight if I manage the load carefully, but I can't keep on pushing or pulling; if I do that, I strain myself and fall on my face in great pain. But with one sack it doesn't go so badly."

"Good. Look me up again. Remember No. 7; walk right in."

With that he slipped a note into Minutten's hand and crossed the road quickly in the direction of the quay. He had had his eye the whole time on the green dress and now started in pursuit.

On reaching Martha Gude's little house he stopped a

moment and glanced about him; nobody was looking. There was no answer to his knock. Twice before he had been to her door without receiving an answer; but this time he had seen her so plainly going home from the market that he would not be turned back. He opened the door resolutely and walked in.

She stood in the middle of the room and looked at him. Her face was pale and startled; so panic-stricken was she that she held her hands straight out, not knowing what in the world to do.

"Pray forgive my intrusion," said Nagel with an unusually respectful bow. "I should be so grateful if you would allow me a moment's conversation. Don't be uneasy; my business is soon dispatched. I have already tried to see you a couple of times, but until to-day I have not been fortunate enough to find you at home. My name is Nagel; I am a stranger here and I'm staying at the Central."

She still said nothing, but set a chair for him and retreated in the direction of the kitchen door. She was fearfully embarrassed and fumbled with her apron as she looked at him.

The room was what he had imagined: a table, a couple of chairs, and a bed were all it contained In the windows were some plants with white flowers, but there were no curtains; the floor was not clean. Nagel also noticed the wretched, high-backed chair in the corner by the bed. It possessed no more than two legs and rested against the wall, broken and miserable. The seat was covered with red plush.

"If I could only reassure you!" said Nagel again. "I can tell you it isn't everybody that's so scared of me when I call on them; it's not the first time I've been to see people here; you're not the only one I've hunted out. I go from house to house; I leave no stone unturned, as

I dare say you've heard. No? Well, it is so. It's part of my calling; I'm a collector, you see; I collect all kinds of old things; I buy people's cast-off belongings and pay whatever they may be worth. Now, don't get frightened, please; I never steal things out of people's houses; I assure you I haven't that bad habit. You may feel quite safe. If I can't buy what I want in a friendly way, why, there's an end of it."

"But I haven't any old things," she said at last, looking pretty desperate.

"They all say that," he replied. "Now, I admit there are certain things which one feels an affection for and therefore does not like to part with, things one has been used to all one's life, heirlooms from one's parents or even from one's grandparents. But on the other hand these antiquated things stand there and are not much use; why should they lumber up the place and lock up money? For I can tell you they may represent quite a decent sum, these useless family heirlooms, and they end by falling to pieces and having to be banished to the loft. So why not sell them in time? Some people get angry when I call, and tell me they don't keep any old things —good; everyone to his taste; I bow and take my departure. There is nothing to be done. Other people feel ashamed and are horrified at the idea of showing me a frying-pan with a hole in it, for instance. That's all they know about it. But then it's just these simple souls who have no conception how highly developed the collecting mania has become. I say mania advisedly; I confess it is pure mania that inspires me and I therefore call it by its right name. But, after all, that only concerns me; that's my own affair. What I was saying was it's both ridiculous and stupid of these people to be bashful about producing an antique. Look at the state of these weapons and rings they dig out of ancient burial

mounds. But do you think they're valueless on that account? Well, am I not right? You ought to see my collection of cow-bells, for instance! I have one bell—a simple iron bell, by the way—which has actually been worshipped as a divinity by an Indian tribe. Imagine, it has hung for countless years on a tent-pole in their camp, the object of prayers and sacrifices. Think of that! But I'm wandering a little from the point. When I get on the subject of my cow-bells, I'm apt to let my tongue run away with me."

"But I really haven't any old things of that sort," said Martha again.

"May I," said Nagel slowly and with the air of a connoisseur, "may I for instance look at that chair there? I merely ask; of course I won't stir until you give me permission. You see, I've had my eye on it from here ever since I came in."

Martha answered in a fluster: "That?—By all means—the legs are broken——"

"The legs are broken, quite correct! And what then? What has that to do with it? Just on that account, perhaps; just on that account! May I ask where it came from?"

Nagel had now got hold of the chair; he turned and twisted it every way and examined it all over. It had no gilding; its only ornament was a sort of crown carved in mahogany surmounting the back. The same back had been hacked with a knife, and the woodwork of the seat had been used for cutting tobacco and bore the marks of it.

"We got it from somewhere abroad; I don't know where. My grandfather once brought home several of these chairs, and this is the only one left. My grandfather was a sailor."

"I see. And your father, was he a sailor too?"

"Yes."

"Then perhaps you sailed with him? Excuse my asking."

"Yes, I sailed with him for many years."

"Really? Now that's interesting! You've seen many countries, ploughed the briny billows, as they say. Dear me! And then you settled down here again? Ah well, east and west, home's best.—By the way, you have no idea where your grandfather picked up this chair? I must tell you I attach great importance to knowing the history of things, tracing their biography, so to speak."

"No, I don't know where he got it, it's so long ago. From Holland, perhaps? No, I don't know."

He noticed with satisfaction that she was growing more and more animated. She had advanced into the room and stood almost at his side as he handled the chair, seeming as though he could never take his eyes off it. He talked incessantly, commenting on the workmanship, and was delighted to discover on the reverse side of the back a little inlaid disk, with another one inlaid upon it—simple work, tasteless, child's work, which was not even neatly carried out. The chair was rotten and he handled it with the greatest care.

"Well," she said, "if you really—I mean if it's any pleasure to you to possess this chair, you're welcome to it. I'll bring it myself to the hotel if you wish. I have no use for it."—And suddenly she was forced to laugh at his eagerness to possess this worm-eaten piece of furniture. "Why, it's only got one sound leg," she said.

He looked at her. Her hair was white, but her smile was youthful and blithe and she had beautiful teeth. When she laughed, her eyes glistened with tears. What a stunning black-eyed old maid! Nagel didn't move a muscle.

"I'm glad," he said in a dry tone, "that you have de-

cided to part with the chair. Now we come to the price. No, excuse me, wait a moment, let me finish; I won't have you asking a price; I always fix it myself. I value the object, offer so much for it, and that's the end. You might demand an unconscionable sum. You might try to force me up—why not? To this you may retort that you haven't a really greedy look—good, I am ready to acknowledge that, but all the same, I have to deal with all kinds of people and I prefer to fix the price myself; then I know what I'm doing. It's a question of principle with me. What's to stop your asking, for instance, three hundred crowns for that chair, if it was left to you? You would be all the more likely to do it, knowing that as a matter of fact we're discussing a rare and valuable piece of furniture. But a fabulous price like that is quite beyond me; I tell you that straight out so that you may have no illusions on that score. I'm not going to ruin myself; I should have to be mad to pay you three hundred crowns for that chair; to come to the point, I'll give you two hundred for it, not a penny more. I'm willing to pay what I consider a thing to be worth, but no more."

She didn't say a word, but stared at him wide-eyed. At last she came to the conclusion that he was joking and began to smile again, in a feeble, confused way.

Nagel calmly took the red notes out of his wallet and waved them in the air, never taking his eyes off the chair. He said: "I won't deny that you might possibly have got more from somebody else; I will be honest and admit that; a *little* more you might perhaps have made. But now I've figured out two hundred as a round sum for this article and I don't see that I can very well go beyond it. However, do as you please; but think it over first. Two hundred crowns is not a bad sum, you know."

"No," she answered with her shy smile; "keep your money."

"Keep my money! What's the meaning of that? May I ask what's wrong with this money? Do you think it's home-made? for you surely don't suspect me of stealing it, what?"

She stopped laughing. The man seemed to be serious and she began to think it over. Did he want to get something out of her, this mad person? His eyes looked capable of anything. God knows, he might have something at the back of his head; he might be laying a trap. Why should he come to her, of all people, with his money? At last she seemed to have reached a conclusion and said: "If you absolutely insist on giving me a crown or two for the chair, I'll be grateful for that. But I won't take more."

He showed signs of extreme surprise, went a step closer, and looked at her. Then he burst out laughing.

"But—have you considered—— It's the first time in my experience a thing like this has happened to me! Well, I can understand a joke—"

"It isn't a joke. I never heard such a thing! I won't have more; I won't have anything. Take the chair if you want it!"

Nagel laughed heartily.

"Again I understand a joke and appreciate it; yes, I'm delighted, deuce take me, I'm delighted! I could die of laughing at a good joke. But now suppose we come to an understanding, eh? Don't you think we might settle the matter right away while the mood lasts? In another minute you'll be putting the chair back in its corner and sticking out for five hundred."

"Take the chair. I—— What are you thinking of?"

They stared at each other.

"If you fancy I'm thinking of anything at all but getting the chair at a reasonable price, you're making a mistake," he said.

Martha cried out again: "But, bless me, take it—take it!"

"I ought of course to be much obliged to you for the generous way in which you meet me. But we collectors keep alive some spark of honour, poor though it may often be, and this honour restrains me, gets on its hind legs, so to speak, and hangs on to me if I try to swindle any one over a valuable piece of property. My whole collection would sink in my—in its owner's—estimation if I were to smuggle such an object in amongst the others; it would cast a certain shadow of falsity over the smallest item among them. I can't help laughing though; it's such a topsyturvy state of affairs that I should have to stand here and take your part instead of looking to my own advantage. But if you force me to it, there is nothing to be said."

She would not give in, no, he made no impression on her. She stuck to it that he must either take the chair for a trifle, a crown or two, or leave it alone. As nothing could prevail against this obstinacy, he said at last to save his face: "Good; we'll leave it at that for to-day. But promise me not to sell the chair to anyone else without letting me know; will you do that? I'm not going to lose it, let me tell you, even if it costs me a little more. At any rate I am willing to pay as much as anyone else, and remember I came first."

On reaching the street Nagel walked off with long, furious steps. What a stiff-necked woman it was, how poverty-stricken and suspicious! Did you see the bed? he said to himself; not even a straw mattress, not even a sheet over it, but two petticoats, and perhaps she had to wear both of them in the daytime when the weather was cold. And yet so scared of getting involved in some unknown thing that she refuses the best of offers! But what the devil had it to do with him? No, it really had

nothing to do with him. But still, she was a very devil of a girl, what? How would it be if he sent a man to bid for the chair, to send up the price; would she suspect that too? Stupid woman, stupid woman! But what made him go there and let himself in for such a crushing snub?

In his irritation he had reached the hotel before he knew where he was. He halted, turned round, still furious, and started down the street again to J. Hansen's tailor's shop, which he entered. He demanded a private interview with the proprietor, ordered a coat, a coat of such and such a kind, and insisted on the tailor's keeping the order secret. When the coat was ready, it was to be sent at once to Minutten, to Grögaard, the crippled coal-heaver, who——

Was it Minutten who was to wear it?

And what then? No inquisitive questions! What was he trying to poke his nose into?

Well, but it was for the measurements.

Ah, just so! Yes, it was Minutten who was to wear it; that was all right; Minutten could come and be measured, why not? But not a word beyond what was necessary, not a wink—was that understood? And when would the coat be ready? In a couple of days; good!

Nagel counted out the money there and then, said goodbye, and left. He rubbed his hands, his irritation was gone, and he sang. Yes, yes, he'd do it after all—he'd do it! Just wait! When he came home, he ran up to his room and rang the bell; his hands trembled with impatience, and no sooner was the door opened than he shouted: "Telegraph forms, Sara!"

He had just opened his violin-case as Sara came in, and she saw to her great astonishment that this case, which she had always handled so gingerly, contained nothing but soiled linen with a few papers and writing materials

underneath, but no violin. Instead of going off at once she stood looking at it.

"Telegraph forms!" he repeated louder than before; "I asked for telegraph forms."

When at last he got the forms, he wrote an order to an acquaintance in Christiania to send secretly and anonymously two hundred crowns to a Fröken Martha Gude of this place, two hundred crowns without a word of writing. Impose complete silence.—Johan Nagel.

But that wouldn't do; on thinking it over he had to drop that plan. Wasn't it better to go into more detail and enclose the money, so as to be sure it would be sent? He tore up the telegram, burnt it at once, and dashed off a letter. Yes, that was better, a regular little letter was more the thing; that would really do the trick. Ah, he'd show her, he'd make her see.—

But after he had put in the money and closed the envelope, he sat for a while thinking it over once more. She might still smell a rat, he said to himself; two hundred crowns was too much of a round sum; over and above it was the sum he had just flashed in her face. No, that wouldn't work either! He took another ten-crown note out of his pocket and altered the amount to two hundred and ten crowns. Then he sealed the letter and sent it off.

For a whole hour this seemed an excellent wheeze when he turned it over. It was to fall upon her like a miraculous missive from heaven, from the heights above, wafted down to her by hands unseen. And what would she say when she got this cash! But when he asked himself a second time what she might say, his courage sank again: the scheme was dangerous, altogether too risky; it was a silly scheme, a bad scheme. The fact was she would say nothing sensible, but only behave like a goose. When the letter came, she would simply make nothing of it and

would leave it to others to worry it out. She would spread it out on the post-office counter so that the whole town would be in it; she would promptly submit the whole thing to the postman; perhaps she might even take an obstinate fit and say: "No, keep your money!" Then the postman would put his finger to his nose and exclaim: "Wait a bit; stop a sec; I've got an idea!" And then he'd turn up the books and find that the same sum was sent off from here a couple of days ago, precisely the selfsame sum, perhaps the selfsame notes into the bargain, two hundred and ten crowns to such and such an address in Christiania. The sender turns out to be a certain Johan Nagel, a stranger, staying for the time being at the Central.—Oh, yes, these postmen had a nose as long as that to sniff things out with.—

Nagel rang again and got the hotel porter to fetch the letter back at once.

The state of nervous excitement he had been in all day made him sick of the whole business at last. It might all go to the devil for him! What affair was it of his that the Lord God arranged a collision with loss of life on the Erie railroad far away in America? None at all! Just so, and he wasn't a scrap more concerned with the respected spinster Martha Gude of this parish.

For two days he did not go outside the hotel.

X

ON Saturday evening Minutten came up to Nagel's room at the hotel. Minutten had on his new coat and was beaming with joy.

"I met Herr Reinert," he said, "and he didn't show a sign; he even asked me who'd given me the coat. He was as sly as that."

"And what did you answer?"

"I laughed and said I wouldn't tell; I wouldn't tell anyone; he'd have to excuse me; good-bye!—Oh, I know how to answer him.—Well, it must be thirteen years now since I had on a new coat, I've been reckoning up.—I must thank you for the last money you gave me; it was far too much for a crippled man; what am I to do with all that money? It's uncanny the way you overwhelm me with your bounties; it feels as if everything was loose inside me and couldn't settle down. God help me, what a child I am! Yes, I knew well enough I'd get the coat some day; didn't I say so? It often takes a little time, but I'm never disappointed. Lieutenant Hansen once promised me two flannel shirts that he'd left off wearing. That's two years ago now, but I'm just as sure of getting them as if I had them on. It's always like that; people remember later on and give me what I want when the time comes. But don't you think I'm like a new man in decent clothes?"

"It's a long time since you were here."

"The fact is I was waiting for the coat; I'd made up my mind not to come to you again in the old one. I have my humours; it hurts me to appear in society with

a ragged coat, God knows why, but it somehow lowers me in my own esteem. Excuse me for talking about my self-esteem as if it was of any consequence. But it isn't; it's the least thing in the world, I assure you; but I feel it now and then all the same."

"Will you have some wine? You won't. But you'll smoke a cigar?"

Nagel rang for wine and cigars. He himself took a big drink to start with, but Minutten sat and smoked and looked on. Minutten went on talking incessantly and seemed as if he would never stop.

"Look here," said Nagel suddenly; "perhaps you're rather badly off for shirts? Excuse my asking."

Minutten made haste to reply: "It wasn't for that I spoke about the two shirts. As sure as I'm sitting here, it wasn't for that."

"Of course not! What are you shouting for? If you have no objection, show me what you have on underneath your coat."

"With pleasure, with pleasure! Look here, on this side. And the other side's no worse.—"

"Ah, wait a bit; it just happens the other side *is* worse, I see."

"But what else do you expect?" cried Minutten. "No, I'm not in want of shirts now, I assure you. I'll go so far as to say that a shirt like this is much too good for me. Do you know where I got it? From Dr. Stenersen; yes, from Dr. Stenersen himself. And I don't believe his wife knew of it, though she's generosity itself. I was given it at Christmas too."

"At Christmas?"

"You think that's a long time ago? I don't wear out a fine shirt like a brute beast; I don't take pains to make holes in it; that's why I take it off at night and sleep naked, so as not to wear it out needlessly while I'm lying

in bed. In that way I make it last much longer and can go about freely among folks without being put to shame for want of a decent shirt. And now it comes in very handy for these tableaux that I've still got a shirt I can show myself in. Fröken Dagny still sticks to it that I've got to appear. I met her yesterday by the church. She said something about you.—"

"And I'll get you a pair of trousers. It must be worth the money to see you appear in public. If Herr Reinert can give you a coat, I can give you a pair of trousers; that's only fair. But I do so on the usual condition, that you keep your mouth shut about it."

"Yes, yes, of course."

"I think you ought to drink a little. Well, well, do as you please. I want something to drink this evening; I'm nervous and rather depressed. Will you permit me an indiscreet question? Are you aware that you have a nickname in the town? They call you Minutten; do you know that?"

"Oh, yes, I know that. I thought it hard to begin with; I prayed to God about it. I spent a whole Sunday up in the woods kneeling all the time in three separate places where it was dry—it was springtime and the snow was thawing. But that's a long time ago, many years ago, and now nobody calls me anything but Minutten, and it's right enough as far as that goes. What made you ask if I knew it? How can I help it, however much I know it?"

"And do you know how you came by such a silly name?"

"Yes, I know that too. That is to say, it's a long time ago now; it was before I became a cripple, but I remember it well. It was one evening, or rather one night, at a bachelor party. I dare say you've seen that yellow house down by the Custom House, on the right as you go down? Well, it was painted white in those days and the mayor

lived there. The mayor was a bachelor and his name was Sörensen, a regular gay dog. It was a spring night then; I was coming from the quay, where I had been walking up and down looking at the shipping. As I came to that yellow house I heard there was a party on; there was a tremendous noise of a lot of people laughing. Just as I was passing, they caught sight of me and knocked on the window. I went in and found myself in the presence of Dr. Kolbye, Captain William Prante, and Collector Folkedahl of the Customs, and several more; well, they're dead or gone away, all of them, but there were seven or eight of them and every one was as drunk as an owl. They had broken all the chairs to bits just for a lark, because the Mayor would have it, and they had smashed all the glasses, so we had to drink out of the bottles. But when I joined them and got as drunk as the others, the row grew worse than ever. The gentlemen took off their clothes and ran about the rooms stark naked, though we hadn't drawn the blinds, and as I wouldn't do as the rest, they took me by force and stripped me. I hit out all the time and did what I could; I saw nothing else for it, but I begged their pardon; I took them by the hand and begged their pardon——"

"What did you beg their pardon for?"

"In case I might have said something that made them go for me. I took them by the hand and begged their pardon so that they might do me as little harm as possible. But it was no good; they stripped me to the skin. And the Doctor found a letter I had in my pocket and started to read this letter aloud to the rest. But that sobered me a little, for the letter was from my mother, who used to write to me when I was at sea. The end of it was I called the Doctor a drainpipe—for everybody knew he drank hard. 'You're a drainpipe!' I said. This made him frightfully angry and he wanted to get me by

the throat, but the others stopped him. 'Let's fill him up instead,' said the Mayor, as if I wasn't full enough already. And they poured more liquor into me from all sorts of different bottles. After that two of the gentlemen came, I don't remember who they were, but they came in with a tub of water; they put down the tub in the middle of the room and said I was to be christened. Well, they all said I was to be christened and they greeted the idea with a terrific yell. And the next was they mixed all sorts of things with the water to make it filthy; they spat in it and emptied spirits in it and all the beastliness they could find, and on top of that they strewed two shovelfuls of cinders from the stove to make it a little muddier still for me. Then I was to be christened. 'Why can't you christen one of the others?' I asked the Mayor, holding him by the knees. 'We've all been christened,' he answered; 'we've been christened just the same,' he said. And I believe they had, for that was a way of his, that all the people he hobnobbed with had to be christened. 'Come here; you are summoned to appear before me!' the Mayor said to me. But I wouldn't go willingly; I stood where I was, hanging on to the door-handle. 'Come at once,' he said; 'will you come this minute!' and he said *minutten* instead of *minuttet,* because he came from Gudbrandsdal and that was the way he talked. But no, I wouldn't come. Then Captain Prante roared out: 'Minutten, Minutten, that's the name; we'll christen him Minutten!' And they all agreed to christen me Minutten because I was so small. Two of them took hold of me and dragged me to the Mayor and ushered me into his presence, and as I was such a diminutive creature, the Mayor took me all by himself and ducked me in the tub. He ducked my head right under and rubbed my nose on the bottom of the tub, which was covered with ashes and broken glass, and then pulled me up again and said prayers over

me. Then the godfathers had to do their duty by me and the way of it was that each of them in turn lifted me off my feet as high as he could and dropped me again, and when they were tired of that, they formed sides and threw me like a ball from one side to the other; they said this was to dry me, and they kept on till they were quite sick of it. Then the Mayor shouted: 'Stop!' and they let me go and called me Minutten, all of them; they took me by the hand and called me Minutten to set the seal on my christening. But once more I was thrown into the tub and it was Dr. Kolbye who threw me in full force, so that I hurt my side, because he couldn't forget that I'd called him a drainpipe.—From that night my nickname stuck to me. Next day the whole town knew I had been at the Mayor's and been christened."

"And so you hurt your side. But you received no injury to the head—I mean, actually to the head?"

Pause.

"Now that's the second time you've asked me whether I've been injured in the head and perhaps you mean something by it. But I didn't hurt my head that time; I had no concussion, if that's what you're afraid of. But I came such a crash against the tub that I broke a rib. But all that's mended now; Dr. Kolbye treated me gratis for the broken rib and I had no more trouble with it."

Nagel had been drinking steadily while Minutten was talking; he rang for more wine and drank again. All at once he said: "There's something I'd like to ask you —do you think I understand men and women to a certain extent? Don't look so astonished; it's only a question from one friend to another. Do you consider me capable of seeing through the person I'm talking to?"

Minutten looked at him shyly and could find nothing to answer. Nagel said again: "You must excuse me, by the way; last time I had the pleasure of seeing you here I

put you out of countenance with some other very stupid questions. You remember amongst other things I offered you a sum of money to assume the paternity of a child. But what made me put my foot in it that time was that I didn't know you; now, however, I've given you a fresh shock in spite of the fact that I know you very well and think very highly of you. But, you see, to-day I do it simply and solely because I'm nervous and already extremely drunk. That's the whole explanation. Of course you can see quite well that I'm in my cups. Oh yes, you can; what's the use of pretending? But what was I going to say?—oh yes, it would really interest me to know how far you regard me as capable of seeing into the human soul. I believe, for instance, I can catch a very subtle undertone in the voice of the person I'm talking to; I have an incredibly fine ear. When I'm talking to a man, I don't have to look at him in order to take in all he says; I can hear at once if he's trying to pull my leg or putting up a yarn. The voice is a dangerous apparatus. Don't misunderstand me; I don't mean just the material sound of the voice, which may be high or low, musical or harsh; I'm not talking about phonetics or acoustics, no; I confine myself to the mystery behind them, the world from which they proceed.—Oh, to hell with this world behind! There always has to be a world behind! What the devil does it matter to me?"

Nagel took another drink and went on: "What makes you so quiet? Don't let my bragging about understanding people put any notions into your head so that you're afraid to move. That'd be a nice thing! Now I've forgotten what I was going to say. Well, well, then I'll say something else that's of no consequence, but I'll say it all the same while I'm remembering the other thing. Good Lord, what bosh I'm talking! What do you think of Fröken Kielland? Let me hear your opinion of her. My

own opinion is that Fröken Kielland is such a thorough-paced coquette that she'd be wildly delighted if a few more men, the more the merrier—myself included—went and took their lives for her sake. That's my opinion. She's lovely, that she is, and it must give one a pang of sweetness to feel oneself trampled under her heel; and that's why I'm going to ask her to do it some day, I take my oath I will. Not just yet though; I've plenty of time.—Lord save me, how I must be scaring you stiff with my talk this evening! Have I offended you? I mean you personally?"

"If you only knew what nice things Fröken Kielland said about you! I met her yesterday; she had a long talk with me.—"

"Tell me—excuse my interrupting—but I wonder whether you haven't a little of that same gift of hearing the vibrations at the back of Fröken Kielland's material voice? But now you can certainly hear that I'm talking the veriest trash? Can't you? Just so! Only I'd be glad to find that you were another judge of men and women; then, you see, I'd congratulate you and say: 'There are two of us, two at most, who understand this sort of thing; come, let's join forces, let's form a little league, and never use our knowledge against one another —*against one another,* you understand—so that I, for instance, will never use my knowledge against you, *however much I may see through you.*' Ah, now you're getting uneasy; now you've got your bashful look again. You mustn't be taken in by my blowing; I'm drunk.—But now I happen to remember what I was going to say just now when I went off about Fröken Kielland, who doesn't really matter. And why should I blurt out my opinion of her when you hadn't asked me? I must have spoilt your good humour completely; do you remember what spirits you were in when you came an hour ago?

All this twaddle's the fault of the wine.—But don't let me forget a second time what I was going to say—when you were telling me about that bachelor party at the mayor's, you remember, when they christened you, then curiously enough the idea occurred to me that *I* would give a bachelor party for a few invited guests; I'm not going to give it up; I'll do it and you must come for one; I count on you for certain. You may feel quite safe; you won't be christened over again; I'll see that you're treated with the greatest respect and civility; in short, there won't be any breaking of chairs or tables. But I'd really like to have a few friends here one evening and the sooner the better; let us say at the end of the week. What do you think?"

Nagel drank again, drank two big glasses. Minutten still made no answer. His first childlike happiness had evidently vanished and he seemed to be listening to his host's chatter from pure politeness. He stuck to his refusal to drink anything.

"You're surprisingly quiet all of a sudden," said Nagel. "It's a ridiculous thing, but do you know that at this moment you look as if something had hit you; as if some word, some hint had gone home. Did you ever hear such a thing, positively gone *home!* Didn't I see you give a little start just now? Oh, you didn't; then I must have been mistaken. Have you ever tried to think how an undiscovered forger would feel if one day a detective laid his hand on his shoulder and looked him in the face without saying anything?—But what on earth am I to do for you? You're getting more and more doleful and reserved. I'm nervous to-day and I'm worrying the life out of you, but I've *got* to talk; it's always the way when I'm drunk. And you mustn't go away either; then I'd be forced to talk to Sara for an hour, the maid, and perhaps that wouldn't be proper, not to mention that it would

be a bore.—Ah well, the human soul! What do you think I caught myself doing the other morning—caught me, Johan Nilsen Nagel, doing? I was walking up and down in front of Consul Andresen's house on the hill there, wondering what the height of his drawing-room might be. What do you think of that? But there, if I may so express it, there you have the human soul again. Nothing, however trifling, is indifferent to it; everything has its importance.—For instance, what impression would you have if you came home late one night from some meeting or other, some job or other, going about your lawful business, and you suddenly come upon a man standing at a street corner who looks at you, turns his head to look at you as you go past, and simply stares at you without saying anything? And now let's suppose into the bargain that this man wears black clothes and you can't see anything of him but the face and eyes, what then? Ah, many a thing may happen in the human soul!—You go one evening to a party, of twelve persons, let's say, and the thirteenth—it may be a telegraph operator, or a poor devil of a graduate of law, or a clerk, or a steamship captain; in short, a person of no consideration whatever—sits in a corner taking no part in the conversation and making no noise at all; but in spite of that, this thirteenth person has a value, not only in himself, but also as a factor in the company. Just because he wears a particular kind of clothes, because he keeps so quiet, because his eyes dwell on the other guests with such a stupid and insignificant stare, and because the figure he has to cut is that of a nobody, he contributes to giving the party the character it has. Just because he says nothing he produces a negative effect and creates the vague pervading note of gloom, which keeps the others' voices to just that pitch of loudness and no more. Am I not right? In this way the person in question may become literally

the mightiest member of the company. As I told you, I'm no judge of people, but all the same it often amuses me to notice what a tremendous value there may be in trifles. I was once present when a perfect stranger, an unfortunate engineer, who simply never opened his mouth—— But that's another story and doesn't concern this one, except that they've both passed through my brain and left their trace there. But to stick to our simile: who knows whether it isn't your silence this evening that has imposed their peculiar tone on my words—apart from my immoderate intoxication—whether the expression of your face, that half-shy, half-innocent look that your eyes have at this moment, isn't the very thing that stimulates me to talk as I'm doing? It's perfectly natural. You listen to what I say—what I, a drunken man, say—now and then you feel that some word or other has gone home —to make use of the same expression as before, *gone home*—and I feel tempted to go still further and fling another dozen words in your face. I only cite this as an example of the value of trifles. Don't neglect trifles, my friend! for God's sake, trifles have an enormous value. —Come in!"

It was Sara who knocked and announced that supper was ready. Minutten got up at once. Nagel was visibly intoxicated and could no longer talk properly; besides which he contradicted himself all the time and got more and more mixed up. His dreamy eyes and the swollen veins in his forehead showed that his head was occupied with many ideas.

"Well," he said, "I'm not surprised that you seize the opportunity to go, after all the nonsense you've had to stomach this evening. Only there are several more things I'd have liked to ask your opinion about; for instance, you've never answered my question about Fröken Kielland. To me she appears the rarest and most unat-

tainable of creatures, full of loveliness, pure and white as snow—imagine a really pure, deep, silky snow. That's my idea of her. If I've given you another impression from what I said before, it's wrong.—Now let me empty the final glass in your presence; here's to you!—But now something's just occurred to me. If you had patience to attend to me for two brief minutes more, I'd be extremely obliged to you. The fact is—come a little nearer; the walls in this house are rather thin—well, the fact is I'm hopelessly in love with Fröken Kielland. Now I've said it! That's only putting the matter in a couple of poor, blunt words, but God in heaven knows how madly I love her and how I suffer for her sake. Well, that's that; I love, I suffer; that's all right; it's nothing to the purpose. No! But I hope you'll treat my frankness with all the discretion it deserves; will you promise? Thanks, dear friend! But, you will say, how can I be in love with her when just now I called her a great coquette? In the first place, one can quite well love a coquette; there's nothing to stop it. But I attach no importance to that. There's another side to the question. How was it now, did you admit you were a judge of people or not? Because if you were a judge of people you'd be able to understand what I'm going to say—I couldn't possibly think that Fröken Kielland really was a coquette. I don't think that seriously. On the contrary, she's a particularly natural person—what do you say for instance to the frank way in which she laughs, knowing that her teeth are not perfectly white? But all the same I can bring myself to put about the opinion that Fröken Kielland is a coquette; that doesn't worry me. And I do it, not to damage her and revenge myself, but from self-preservation; I do it from love of self, because she is unattainable by me, because she scorns all my efforts to make her care for me, because she's engaged and already bound; she's lost, altogether lost.

You see, this is with your permission a new and erratic side of the human soul. I might go up to her in the street and say to her as seriously as possible and in the hearing of several people, apparently simply to humiliate her and do her harm; I might look at her and say: 'Good morning, Fröken! Congratulate you on a clean chemise!' What do you think of that? But I could say it. What I should do next—whether I should run home and sob into a pocket-handkerchief or whether I'd treat myself to one or two drops from the little bottle I carry in my waistcoat pocket—I leave undecided. In the same way I might go into church one Sunday, while her father, Pastor Kielland, is preaching the word of God, walk right up the nave, stop by Fröken Kielland, and say aloud: 'Will you allow me to touch your puff?' Well, what do you think of that? By puff I shouldn't mean anything in particular, just something to make her blush; 'Permit me to feel the puff of your sleeve,' I would say. And afterwards I might throw myself at her feet and beseech her to transport me to the seventh heaven by spitting on me.—Now you're properly scared; well, I admit I'm using rather ribald language, more by token that I'm talking about a parson's daughter to a parson's son. Forgive me, my friend; it isn't wickedness, it isn't pure wickedness; it's because I'm as full as a tank.—Listen: I once knew a young man who stole a lamp-post, sold it for old iron, and spent the money in riotous living. That's God's truth; I knew the man myself, a relation of the late Pastor Hærem. But what's that got to do with me and Fröken Kielland? No, there you're right again! You don't say anything, but I can see that you're bursting to say it and it's a perfectly correct remark. But as regards Fröken Kielland, she's utterly lost to me and I don't pity her for it, but myself. And you, standing there stone-cold sober and seeing through people, you'll understand when one

day I go and spread a report in the town that Fröken Kielland has been sitting on my knee, that I've met her three nights running at such and such a place in the woods and that she has accepted presents from me. You'll understand that, won't you? Yes, you're such a devilish fine judge of people; oh, yes, you are, my friend, don't attempt to deny it.—Has it never happened to you to be walking along the street one day, full of your innocent thoughts and suspecting nothing, till all at once everybody begins to stare at you and look you up and down? It's an extremely painful situation. You dust yourself shamefacedly front and back, you look down furtively to see if any buttons are undone, and you're so full of misgivings that you even take off your hat to see if there's a price-ticket still hanging to it in spite of its being an old hat. But it's no good; you find nothing wrong and you have just to put up with every shop-boy's and every lieutenant's staring you out of countenance.—But, my dear friend, if that gives you all the torments of hell, what shall we say about being summoned to appear in court?—There, you gave a start again? Didn't you? Fancy, I felt so sure you gave a little start—well, as I was saying, how about being summoned to appear before the cunningest devil of a police magistrate, being cross-examined before a crowd of people, so that you're led back by twelve different, tortuous paths to one and the same point; oh, what an exquisite treat for the man who has nothing to do with it all, but simply listens and looks on!—God knows whether there isn't a glass of wine left if I squeeze the bottle——"

He emptied the last drop down his throat and went on: "I must beg your pardon, by the way, for constantly changing the subject. All these sudden leaps in my train of thought are no doubt partly due to my being so deplorably drunk, but to some extent they're a radical defect in me. The fact is I'm only a simple agronomist, a pupil

from a cow-dung academy; I am a thinker who has never learnt to think. Well, don't let us get on to such special topics; they don't interest you, and for me, knowing my own past, they are positively revolting. Do you know, it's often so bad that when I'm sitting here alone thinking of all sorts of things and taking stock of myself, I often call myself Rochefort out loud; I rap myself on the noddle and call myself Rochefort. What would you say if I told you I once ordered a signet-ring with a hedgehog on it?—That reminds me of a man I once knew as a perfectly ordinary and respectable student of philology at a German university. The man went to the bad; in the course of two years he became not only a drunkard but a novelist. If he met people and they asked him who he was, he simply answered that he was a fact. 'I am a fact!' he said, pursing his lips from sheer arrogance. Well, that doesn't interest you.—You were talking about a man, a thinker who had never learnt to think. Or was it myself who was talking about him? I beg pardon; you see, I'm dead drunk now; but that's nothing; don't let that worry you. However, I'd like you to let me explain about this thinker who couldn't think. As far as I understood your statement, you were going to attack the man. Oh yes, that was my distinct impression; you spoke in a scornful tone; but the man you mentioned deserves to be seen more or less in perspective. In the first place he was a great fool. Oh yes, I won't retract that; he was a fool. He always wore a long, red tie and he smiled from pure foolishness. In fact, so foolish was he that very often he would be deep in a book when anyone came to see him, though he never read. Another thing was that he wore no socks, so as to be able to afford a rose for his buttonhole. That was the sort of man he was. But the best of all was that he had a lot of portraits—portraits of ordinary, neat-looking, working-

class girls, and he used to put grand and high-sounding names on these portraits to give the impression that he had a lot of swagger acquaintances. On one of the photos he wrote very clearly 'Fröken Stang,' to make people think she was a relation of the Prime Minister, though the girl's name can only have been Lie or Haug at the most. What is one to think of such bunkum? He used to imagine that people were talking about him, maligning him. 'People malign me!' he said. He he, do you really think anyone took the trouble to malign him? And then one day he walked into a jeweller's smoking two cigars. Two cigars! One in his hand, the other in his mouth, but both were alight. Perhaps he didn't know he had two cigars going at once and, being a thinker who hadn't learnt to think, he didn't inquire either.—"

"Now I must be going," said Minutten at last in a low voice.

Nagel got up at once.

"Must you go?" he said. "Will you really leave me now? Well, I dare say it's rather a long story if we're to see the man in perspective. We'll leave it till another time, then. I see, you insist on going now? Look here —a thousand thanks for your visit. Do you hear? I'm most remarkably drunk this evening; what do I really look like? Take your thumb, look at it under the magnifier, and see what you see, eh? Ah, I see what you're at; you're an unholy clever man, Herr Grögaard; it's a joy to me to look into your eyes, they're so innocent. Light another cigar before you go. When are you coming again? Bless my soul, I forgot, you must come to my bachelor party, do you hear? Not a hair of your head shall be ruffled.—No—I must tell you, it's only going to be a cosy little evening party, a cigar, a glass, a chat, and cheers for the Fatherland nine times nine, for Dr. Stenersen's benefit, what? It'll go all right. And

you shall have those trousers we were talking about, damn me if you shan't. On the usual condition, of course. Thank you for being so patient this evening. Let me shake hands with you. Light another cigar, man.—I say, one word more: isn't there anything you'd like to ask me for? If there is, out with it! All right, as you please. Good-night, good-night."

XI

THEN came the 29th of June. It was a Monday. One or two things happened on that day out of the ordinary; in fact a strange person appeared in the town, a veiled lady who vanished again after a couple of hours' stay, during which she paid a visit to the hotel.—

Quite early in the morning Johan Nagel had been cheerfully humming and whistling in his room. As he dressed, he whistled merry tunes, as though in very high spirits about something. All the previous day he had been silent and subdued after his heavy debauch on Saturday evening in Minutten's presence. He had prowled about the room with long steps and drunk a great quantity of water. When he left the hotel on Monday morning, he was still humming and looked extremely well pleased with himself; in a fit of gladness he even spoke to a woman who was standing at the bottom of the steps and gave her a few coppers.

"Can you tell me where I can borrow a violin?" he asked. "Do you know if there's anybody in town who plays the violin?"

"No, I don't know anyone," the astonished woman answered.

She didn't know, but all the same he gave her some coppers in his gladness and hurried away. He had seen Dagny Kielland coming out of a shop with her red parasol and he made straight for her. She was alone. He made a low bow and spoke to her. She went flaming red as usual and held her parasol in front of her to hide it.

They talked at first of their walk in the woods. She had been a little incautious all the same; yes, she had really caught a little cold, although the weather was so warm; she had not quite got rid of it yet. She said this frankly and simply, as though confiding it to an old acquaintance.

"But you mustn't regret it, will you?" he said, going straight to the point.

"No," she replied with a look of surprise; "no, I don't regret it; what puts that into your head? No, it was a very interesting night, I thought; though, dear me, how frightened I was all the time of that Jack o' Lantern you told me about. And I've dreamt of him since. A terrible dream!"

And then they talked for a while of Jack o' Lantern. Nagel was full of chat to-day; he owned that he too had ridiculous fits of tongue-tied fear of one thing or another; for instance, he often couldn't go upstairs without looking round at every step to see if anyone was behind him. What was it? Ah, what! Some mysterious something, some queer thing that poor "omniscient" science was too angular and too crude to catch, a breath from an invisible power, an impulse of the blind forces of life.

"Do you know," he said, "that at this moment I feel inclined to turn out of this street into another because these houses here, these curb-stones on the left, those three pear-trees in the Magistrate's garden, all influence me antipathetically, fill me with dull pain. When I'm walking alone, I never take this street; I always go round, even if it takes me out of my way. Now, what is that?"

Dagny laughed.

"I don't know. But I expect Dr. Stenersen would call it superstition and nerves."

"Quite right, that's what he'd call it! Ah, what bumptious stupidity! You arrive one evening in a strange town, this town, let us say; why not? Next day you

stroll through the streets to take a first look round. In the course of your walk you take a pronounced private dislike to certain streets, certain houses, while other streets and other houses appeal to you, give you a feeling of pleasure. Nerves? But now I will suppose that you have nerves like wire cables, that you have no idea what nervousness means. On you go through the streets; you meet hundreds of people and pass them indifferently, but all of a sudden—as you stop on your way to the quay by a shabby little one-storey house with no curtains, but with white flowers in the window—a man comes towards you who strikes you at once in one way or another. You look at the man and the man looks at you. There is nothing unusual about him except that he is poorly clad and walks with a stoop; it's the first time in your life you've come across him and you have an odd intuition that his name is Johannes. Johannes and nothing else. What makes you hit upon Johannes for his name? That you can't explain, but you see it in his eyes, in the way he moves his arms; you hear it in the sound of his footsteps; and it's not that you have ever met some other man who was like this one and whose name was Johannes; no, it's not due to that. For you have never met anyone that this man reminds you of. But there you are with your surprise and your mystical impression, and you're quite unable to explain it."

"Have you met a man like that here?"

"No, no," he hastened to reply; "I'm only *supposing* this town, this one-storey house, and this man; I'm supposing the whole thing. But don't you agree that it's strange?—Then another queer thing happens: you come to a strange town and enter a strange house, an hotel, let us say, that you've never been in before. All at once you have a very strong impression that once upon a time, perhaps many years ago, this house has been a drug store.

What makes you think that? There is nothing to remind you of it; there is no smell of medicines, none at all, no marks of shelves on the walls, and no worn track on the floor where a counter might have stood. And yet you know in your heart that so many years ago there was a drug store in this house. There is no mistake about it, you are penetrated for the time being with a mysterious complicity which reveals hidden things. Perhaps you have never experienced it?"

"I've never thought about it before. But now you talk of it, I believe I've experienced it too. At any rate I'm often afraid of the dark, afraid of nothing at all. But that may be something different."

"God knows what is different and what is not! So many things happen between heaven and earth, strange, beautiful, unparalleled things and quite inexplicable presentiments, speechless terrors which make you shudder with discomfort. Imagine that you hear someone brushing against the walls on a dark night. You are wide awake, smoking a pipe and sitting at a table, with blurred senses. Your head is full of plans which you're turning over, and you are extraordinarily keen on getting these plans straightened out. Then all at once you hear quite plainly someone brushing against the walls outside, scraping along the panelling outside, or actually in your room, over by the stove, where you can now see a shadow on the wall. You take the lamp-shade off to make it lighter, and go over to the stove. You face the shadow and see an unknown person, a man of middle height with a black and white choker round his neck and with perfectly blue lips. He looks like the knave of clubs in a Norwegian pack of cards. Now I assume that you are more inquisitive than afraid; you go close up to the fellow to sweep him away with a glance; but he doesn't move, though you're so close to him that you see him blink his

eyes and are convinced that he is as much alive as yourself. Then you try being sociable; you say something of this sort, though you have never seen him before: 'Your name doesn't happen to be Homan, Bernt Homan?' you say. And as he doesn't answer, you decide to call him Homan and say: 'Why the hell shouldn't you be a Bernt Homan?' And then you snigger at him. But still he doesn't move and you don't know what to do next. You take a step back and make a dig at him with your pipe-stem and say: 'Bah!' But he doesn't give a ghost of a smile. Well, that finishes it; you get annoyed and give the man a good smack. But now the man looks as though to be sure he was present somewhere about the place, but your smack had nothing to do with him all the same. He doesn't fall down; he puts both hands in his pockets, deep down in his pockets, hoists his shoulders, and puts on an air as much as to say: 'What then?' So little effect did your smack have on him. 'What then!' you answer furiously and give him another whack in the pit of the stomach. What happens now is this—after your last blow you see the man begin to fade away; you watch him with your own eyes as he is gradually wiped out, getting more and more indistinct till at last there is nothing left of him but his stomach, and then that too disappears. But all the time he has kept his fists in his pockets and looked at you with his defiant expression, which seemed to say: 'What then?'"

Dagny laughed again.

"Oh, what queer adventures you have! Well, but what then? How did it all end?"

"Why, when you sit down again at the table, ready to take up your plans again, you discover that you've knocked the skin off your knuckles against the wall.—But what I was going to say was—tell your friends this story and then you'll hear something. 'You were asleep,' they'll say.

Oh, yes, you were asleep, though God and all his angels know that you were *not* asleep. It's only pedagogues' wisdom and vulgar prejudice to call it sleep when you've been standing wide awake by a stove and smoked a pipe and talked to a man. Then the doctor comes. He's an excellent doctor and he represents Science with pursed lips and a superior air. 'This,' he says, 'why, this is nothing but nerves,' he says. O God, what a game it is! Good: but 'All this is just nerves,' he says. For the doctor's brain is a thing of fixed dimensions, so many inches high and so many inches broad, something you can take in your fist, good, thick, nervous substance. And then he writes iron and quinine on a bit of paper and cures you on the spot. That's the way it's done! But just imagine, what wooden-headedness, what clownish logic, to force himself with his dimensions and his quinine into a sphere where even the finest and wisest minds can find no explanation!"

"You're losing a button," she said.

"Am I losing a button?"

She pointed with a smile to one of his jacket buttons which was dangling by a thread.

"Why not pull it off? You'll lose it very soon."

He humoured her, took a knife out of his pocket, and cut the button off. As he took out his knife, some coins and a medal with a sadly damaged ribbon fell out of his pocket. He bent down hurriedly and picked the things up while she looked on. Then she said: "Is that a medal? But what a way to treat it; look at the ribbon! What sort of a medal is it?"

"It's a medal for saving life.—Oh, you mustn't think it's through any merit of mine that I have it about me. It's only humbug."

She looked at him: his face was perfectly calm, his eyes frank and open as though what he said was the

truth itself. She still had the medal in her hand.

"Are you going to start that again?" she said. "If you didn't win it yourself how can you keep such a thing, carry it about on you?"

"I bought it!" he cried with a laugh. "It's mine, my property; I own it as I own my penknife, my jacket button; why should I throw it away?"

"To think that you would buy a medal!" she said.

"Yes, it's humbug, I don't deny it; but what will one not do at times? I once wore it on my breast a whole day, showed it off, had my health drunk on the strength of it. Isn't one kind of bluff as good as another?"

"The name is scratched out," she said.

His expression changed suddenly and he put out his hand for the medal.

"Is the name scratched out? Impossible; let me see. It's only got worn in my pocket; I've carried it with my small change, that's all."

Dagny looked at him incredulously. Then all at once he snapped his fingers and exclaimed: "How forgetful I am. The name *is* scratched out, you're right; how did I come to forget it? I scratched it out myself; it's quite right. You see, it wasn't my name that was on it; it was the owner's name, the rescuer's name. I dug it out as soon as I got it. You must excuse my not telling you that at once; I didn't mean to tell a lie. The fact is I was thinking about something else—how did you come to be nervous all of a sudden about that button coming off? What if it had come off? Was that your answer to what I was saying about nerves and science?"

Pause.

"It's very remarkable what candour you always show me," she said, without answering his question. "I don't know what the object of it can be. Your views are rather unusual; just now you would have me suppose

that everything was really humbug, that nothing was noble, nothing pure, nothing great; is that what you think? Is it exactly the same thing whether one buys a medal for so many crowns or wins it by some brave deed?"

He made no reply. She went on, slowly and earnestly: "I can't make you out. Sometimes when I listen to your talk I ask myself if you're really in your senses. Excuse my saying so. You disturb me a little more every time I meet you, shatter my nerves a little more, I may say; you upset my ideas about everything, no matter what you talk about; you turn everything upside down. How is it? I've never met anyone who contradicts all my notions as you do. Tell me, how much do you actually mean of what you say; what do you really mean in your heart?"

She put the question so earnestly, so warmly, that he gave a start.

"If I had a God," he said, "a God who was to me sacred and sublime, I would swear by that God that I honestly mean all that I have said to you, absolutely all, and that I mean it for the best even when I mystify you. When we were talking the other day, you said I represented the opposite of what other people think about things. Well, that's true; I admit I'm a living contradiction and I don't understand it myself. But I'm unable to conceive why everybody else doesn't think the same way about these things as I do. So transparently clear do these questions appear to me and so glaring seems to me the connection between them. That is what I mean in my heart, Fröken; would I could get you to believe me, now and ever."

"Now and ever—no, that's more than I can promise."

"It would mean so infinitely much to me," he said.

They had entered the wood and were walking so close to each other that their sleeves often touched; the weather was so calm that they could speak in quite low tones. Now and then a bird twittered.

Then he stopped so abruptly that she stopped too.

"How I have been longing for you lately!" he said. "No, no, don't be so alarmed; I've scarcely said anything and I don't expect anything; no, I have no illusions at all, as far as that goes. Besides, perhaps you don't even understand me; I've made a bad beginning and put my foot in it; I've said what I didn't mean to say——"

As he said no more, she remarked: "How strange you are to-day!"

And she was moving on again. But he stopped her a second time: "Dear Fröken Kielland, wait a moment! Be a little indulgent with me to-day. I'm afraid to speak; I'm frightened you will interrupt me and say: 'Go!' And yet I have been reflecting for many wakeful hours."

She looked at him with growing surprise and asked: "What is the drift of all this?"

"The drift of this? Will you let me tell you in plain words? The drift of this is—that I love you, Fröken Kielland. Well, I don't really see how it can surprise you; I'm made of flesh and blood, I've met you, and I've become infatuated with you; there's nothing very strange about that, is there? It's another matter that perhaps I shouldn't have confessed it to you."

"No, you should not."

"But to what lengths may one not be driven? I have even slandered you out of sheer love for you; I have called you a coquette and tried to drag you down, simply to console and recoup myself, knowing you to be unattainable. This is the fifth time I've met you and I have waited for this fifth time before giving myself away, though I might have done so the first time. Besides, it's my birthday to-day; I'm twenty-nine, and I've been singing and feeling happy ever since I opened my eyes this morning. I thought—well, of course it's ridiculous to take such silly notions into one's head, but I thought to

myself: 'If you meet her to-day and make your confession, perhaps there's no harm in its being your birthday into the bargain. You can tell her that too and perhaps she will forgive you more readily on account of the day.' You're smiling? Yes, it's ridiculous, I know; but there's no help for it, all the same. I offer you my tribute just the same as all the others."

"Then it's a pity this should have come to-day," she said. "You've been unlucky with your birthday. More than that I can't say."

"No, of course not.—Goodness, what power you have! I can understand a man's being driven to do anything for your sake. Even now, as you spoke these not very cheerful words, even now your voice was like a song. I positively had a feeling that I was bursting into flower. How strange it is! Do you know that I have wandered about outside your home at night trying to catch a glimpse of you at a window; that I have knelt here in the wood and prayed to God for you—I who have no particular belief in God? Do you see that aspen there? What made me halt just here is that I have knelt many a time under that aspen, steeped in despair, stunned and forlorn, just because you were never out of my thoughts. From here I have said good-night to you every evening; I have knelt and begged the wind and the stars to bring you greetings and I believe you must have felt it in your sleep."

"What makes you tell me all this? Don't you know that I'm——"

"Yes, yes!" he interrupted with extraordinary emotion. "I know what you're going to say, that you promised yourself to another long ago, and that I'm a dishonourable person to force myself upon you now that it's too late—how could I help knowing this? Well, why have I told you all this? To influence you, to be sure; to impress you and make you think about it. By God, I'm speaking the truth

now; I can do nothing else. I know that you're engaged, that you have a sweetheart of whom you're fond, and therefore I can expect nothing; but all the same I want to try to influence you a little; I won't give up all hope. Try to think what it means to give up all hope; then perhaps you will understand me better. When I said just now that I expected nothing, I was telling a lie. And I only said it to reassure you for the moment and gain time, so that you might not be too alarmed all at once. I say, am I putting my foot in it? I don't mean that you have ever encouraged me to hope, nor have I ever imagined I could cut anyone out. Alas, that never even occurred to me. But in my disconsolate hours I have thought to myself: 'Yes, she's engaged and she'll soon be gone; farewell; but then she's not absolutely lost yet; she's not gone yet; she's not married or dead, so who knows? And if I tried my hardest perhaps there is yet time!' You have become my constant thought, my obsession; I see you in everything around me and every blue stream is to me Dagny. I don't believe a single day has passed without my thinking of you. No matter what time of day I leave the hotel, as soon as I open the door and go down the steps the hope shoots through my heart—perhaps you will meet her now! and I look for you in all directions. No, I don't understand it; I can't control it. Believe me, if I have now let myself go, it was not without a fight. It's not very encouraging to know in your heart that all your efforts are sadly wasted and yet not be able to give them up; and that's what makes one resist to the last. But what if it is no good at all? You invent all sorts of things when you sit in your room at night and can't sleep. You hold a book in your hand, but don't read it; again and again you clench your teeth and read three lines, but can go no further; you shut the book again with a shake of the head. Your heart beats wildly; you whisper to yourself

sweet, secret words, call upon a name, and kiss it in imagination. And the clock strikes two, four, six; then you decide to make an end of it; next time you get a chance you take the plunge and confess all.—If I might ask anything of you now, it would be to keep quiet. I love you, but keep quiet. Wait three minutes."

She listened to him in sheer dismay and could not get out a word in answer. They were standing still all this time.

"Oh, but you must be mad!" she said, shaking her head. And she added, pale and distressed, with a sheen of blue ice in her eyes: "You know that I'm engaged; you remember that and take it for granted, and yet——"

"Certainly I know it! Could I forget his face and his uniform? He's a handsome man, we know, and it isn't that I find any fault with him; but I could wish him dead and gone. What use is it that I say to myself a hundred times: 'You'll do no good there?' I prefer to drop thinking of the impossibility and say to myself: 'Oh yes, I may do some good; all sorts of things may happen; there's yet hope.'—And there is hope, isn't there?"

"No, no, don't drive me to distraction!" she cried. "What do you want me to do? What's your idea? Do you think that I—— Oh dear, don't let us talk any more about it, if you don't mind. Now go. You've spoilt everything just with a few silly words; you've spoilt all our talks together, and now we can't meet any more. What did you do it for? No, I never heard anything like it! Well, well, don't let's have any more of it, I beg you, for your own sake as well as mine. You know quite well that I can be nothing to you; I can't make out how you ever came to imagine I could. So now let there be an end of it. You must go home and try to be patient. Oh dear, I'm honestly sorry for you all the time; but I can't act otherwise."

"But is it to be good-bye now? Am I looking at you for the last time? No, no, I say! I promise to be calm, to talk about anything else you like, but never about this; can we then meet? If I'm perfectly calm, I mean? Perhaps some day when you're tired of all the others; as long as it's not the very last time to-day. You shake your head again—your lovely head, you shake it. How impossible everything is!—Even if you won't agree to it, you might say yes and tell a lie to make me happy. For this is a sad day for me, very sad, though I was singing this morning. Only once more!"

"You ought not to ask me that, when I can't promise it. Besides, what would be the use? Go now, do! Perhaps we may meet again, I don't know, but it's quite likely. No, go now, do you hear?" she broke out impatiently. "You'll be doing me a real kindness," she added.

Pause. He stood gazing at her, his chest heaving. Then he pulled himself together and bowed; he dropped his cap on the ground and seized her hand, which she had not offered him, pressing it hard between both his. She gave a little cry and he dropped her hand at once, in despair at having caused her pain. And he stood gazing after her as she left him. A few more steps and she would be gone! A flush rose to his cheeks; he bit his lip till it bled and was going, turned his back in wrathful devotion. When all was said and done, he was still a man; it was all right, everything was all right, good-bye——

Suddenly she turned round and said: "And you mustn't hang about the parsonage at night, you really mustn't. So it was you who made the yard dog bark so furiously the last few nights. One night Papa was on the point of getting up. It can't be allowed, do you hear? I hope you're not going to get us both into trouble."

Only these words; but at the sound of her voice his anger was gone; he shook his head.

"And it was my birthday to-day!" he said. And saying that he laid his arm across his face and went.

She turned to watch him, hesitated a moment, and then ran back and seized his arm.

"You must forgive me, but it can't be otherwise; I can be nothing to you. But perhaps we shall meet again some time; don't you think so? Well, now I must go."

She turned again and went rapidly away.

XII

A VEILED lady came walking up from the quay, where she had just landed from the steamer. She made straight for the Central Hotel.

Nagel happened to be standing at the window of his room looking out; till then he had spent the whole afternoon striding restlessly up and down, only stopping now and then to drink a glass of water. His cheeks were unusually flushed, feverishly flushed, and his eyes were burning. For hour after hour he had been thinking of one and the same thing; his last meeting with Dagny Kielland.

For a moment he had tried to persuade himself that he had only to leave the place and forget it all. He got as far as opening his trunk and taking out some papers, one or two brass instruments, a flute, some sheets of music, clothes, among them a new buff suit, exactly like the one he had on, and various other things which he strewed about the floor. Yes, he would go away; this town was no longer fit to stay in; there were no more flags to be seen and its streets were dead; why shouldn't he leave? And besides, why the devil had he ever wanted to poke his nose in here? It was a miserable little hole of a place, with petty, long-eared inhabitants.

But he knew very well that he was not going to leave and that he was only trying to stiffen his back by playing with the idea. Dejectedly he packed all his things again and put the trunks back in their place. Then in utter distraction he paced up and down between the door and the window with rapid steps, while the clock downstairs struck one hour after another. At last it struck six.—

When he stopped at the window and caught sight of the veiled lady in the act of entering the hotel, his face completely changed and he put his hand to his head once or twice. Well, why not? She had just as much right in the place as he. But it was no concern of his; he had other things to think of, and, besides, he and she had settled their score.

He forced himself to be calm, sat down at once in a chair, picked up a paper from the floor, and pretended to read it. Not more than a minute or two had passed when Sara opened the door and handed him a card on which was written in pencil: "Kamma." Nothing else. He got up and went downstairs.

The lady was standing in the hall; she had her veil on. Nagel bowed to her in silence.

"How are you, Simonsen?" she said in a loud voice, full of emotion. Simonsen, she said.

He started, but collected himself at once and called to Sara: "Where can we go for a moment?"

They were shown into a room next to the dining-room, where the lady sank into a chair as soon as the door closed behind them. She was in great agitation.

Their conversation was fragmentary and obscure, with bits of words which none but themselves could understand, and full of allusions to the past. They had met before and knew one another. Their interview lasted less than an hour. The lady's accent was Danish rather than Norwegian.

"Excuse my still calling you Simonsen," she said. "That delightful old pet name! How it reminds me of old times! Every time I say it to myself I can see you quite plainly."

"When did you come?" asked Nagel.

"Now, just now, a few minutes ago; I came by the steamer.—Well, I'm going away again at once."

"So soon?"

"Listen," she said; "you're glad I'm going again at once; do you think I can't see that?—Oh, what ought I to do for my chest? tell me that. Feel here; no, higher up. What do you think of it? I believe it's rather worse; I mean, it's got worse since we saw each other, hasn't it? Well, that's neither here nor there.—Do I look untidy? Tell me if I do. How does my hair look? Perhaps I'm dirty too, downright dirty; I've been travelling for twenty-four hours.—You haven't changed; you're just as cold, just as cold.—I suppose you haven't got a comb on you?"

"No.—What put it into your head to come here? What is it that——"

"Same question to you—what put it into *your* head to go and hide in a place like this? Did you think I shouldn't find you?—I say, you're an 'agronomist' here, aren't you? I came across some men on the quay who said you were an agronomist and had been doing something with a certain Fru Stenersen's garden. Been looking after some currant bushes, working in your shirt-sleeves two days on end. What an idea!—My hands are so icy; you know, I'm always like that when I'm upset, and I'm upset now. And you haven't any sympathy with me, though I call you Simonsen, like old times, and show myself cheerful and happy. This morning, while I was still in my berth, I thought to myself: 'I wonder how he'll receive me; won't he anyhow call me pet names and chuck me under the chin?' And I was almost sure you'd do that, but I made a mistake. Mind, I don't ask you to do it now. Please note that. It's too late; I don't want any of that. —Tell me, what do you blink your eyes for all the time? Are you thinking of something else while I'm talking to you?"

All he answered was: "I'm really not very well to-day,

Kamma. Couldn't you tell me straight out why you have come to see me? You'd be doing me a kindness."

"Why I've come to see you?" she cried. "Heavens, how terribly you can hurt one! Are you afraid I'm going to ask you for money, that I've come simply and solely to raid you? Don't be afraid to confess it if you really have any such black thoughts in your heart.—But what *did* I come to see you for? Can't you guess? Have you no idea what day it is to-day? Have you forgotten your own birthday?"

And she threw herself sobbing on her knees and grasped both his hands, which she held to her face and pressed against her bosom.

He was at once strangely moved by this impulsive tenderness, which he had not expected to see again; he pulled her up and put her on his knees.

"*I* have not forgotten your birthday," she said; "I always remember it. You don't know how I've cried over you many a time when I can't sleep at night for thinking.—Dear boy, you still have the same red lips! I thought of so many things on the boat; I wondered whether your lips were still as red as ever.—How your eyes wander about! You're not getting impatient, are you? You're just the same as you were, only your eyes do wander about as if you were wondering how to get rid of me as soon as possible. Wouldn't it be better if I sat on the chair by you; you like that better, I'm sure? I have so many, many things to say to you and I must hurry; the steamer will soon be leaving and you simply muddle my head with your look of unconcern. What can I say to make you listen to me? You're really not a bit grateful to me for remembering the day and coming here. —Have you had many flowers? Yes, you must have. I suppose Fru Stenersen remembered you? Tell me, what does she look like, this Fru Stenersen, for whose benefit

you're playing 'agronomist?' Just like you!—I would have brought you some flowers too if I'd been able to afford it, but I'm too hard up just now.—Oh dear, do listen to me for these few poor minutes, won't you do that? How changed everything is! Do you remember once—but of course you don't remember and it's no use reminding you; but once you recognized me a long way off simply by the feather in my hat and came running up as soon as you saw it. You know very well that's true, don't you? It was one day on the Ramparts. But now I've forgotten why I mentioned that about the feather; Oh dear, I can't remember how I was going to use it against you, though I know it was a good argument.—What's the matter? What are you jumping up for?"

He got up, crossed the room on tiptoe, and pulled the door open with a jerk.

"They're ringing and ringing for you in the dining-room," he said through the doorway.

And sitting down again he nodded to Kamma and whispered: "I guessed she'd be looking through the keyhole."

Kamma was impatient.

"What if she did look?" she said. "Why in the world are you so full of a thousand other thoughts just now? I've been sitting here for a quarter of an hour and you haven't even asked me to take off my veil. Don't dare to ask me *now!* It never occurred to you how horrid it must be to have a winter veil over one's face in this heat. Well, it's only what I deserve; what did I want to come here for? I heard you ask the maid if we might come in here just for a moment. 'Just for a moment,' you said. That must have meant that you'd see and get rid of me in a minute or two. Well, well, I'm not reproaching you, only it makes me so unspeakably sad. God help me!—And why can't I ever let you go? I know that you're

mad, that your eyes are perfectly crazy; it's a fact, I've been told so and I'm quite ready to believe it. But all the same I can't let you go. Dr. Nissen said you were mad, and God knows you must have been mad indeed to come and put up at a place like this and call yourself an agronomist. I never heard anything like it! And you still wear that iron ring on your finger and go about in that shrieking yellow suit that nobody but you would be seen in——"

"Did Dr. Nissen say I was mad?" he asked.

"Dr. Nissen said it straight out! Do you want to know whom he said it to?"

Pause. He reflected for a moment; then looked up again and asked: "Tell me honestly, couldn't I help you with a little money, Kamma? You know I can."

"Never!" she cried, "never, do you hear! What in the name of wonder makes you think you can fling one insult after another in my face?"

Pause.

"I don't know," he said, "why we should sit here saying bitter things to each other.—"

But now she burst into tears and lost all self-control:

"Who is it that's bitter? Is it I? How utterly you've changed in a few months only! I come here for no other purpose but to—— I don't expect to have my feelings reciprocated any more and you know I'm not the sort to beg for that, but I hoped at least you would treat me with some charity.—Great Heaven, what a wretched life mine is! I ought to tear you out of my heart and I can't do it; I follow you wherever you go and fall at your feet. Do you remember that day in the Drammen Road when you hit a dog on the nose for jumping up at me? Oh, it was my fault; I shrieked, thinking it was going to bite; but it wasn't, it only wanted to play; and when you had hit it, it grovelled before us and lay down instead

of running away. And then you cried over the dog and patted it; I saw your tears though you tried to hide them; but now you don't shed any, although—— But I don't intend this for a comparison; you don't imagine I'm comparing myself to a dog, do you? God Almighty knows what you might be insolent enough to think. Now I recognize your face again. I saw your smile; oh yes, you did, you smiled! You sneer at me to my very face! Let me tell you straight out—— No, no, no, forgive me! I'm in such utter despair again. You see before you a broken woman; I am utterly broken; give me your hand. Oh, why can't you ever forget that little lapse of mine? It was only a trifle, if you would but reflect. It was wrong of me not to come down to you that evening; you signalled and signalled and I didn't come down; God knows how deeply I regret it! But he was not with me, as you thought; he had been there, but he was not there then; he'd gone. You see, I confess and beg for mercy. But I ought to have turned him out, yes, turned him out; I admit that, I'm ready to admit anything, and I shouldn't—— No, I can't understand—I can't understand anything now——"

Pause. The silence was only broken by Kamma's sobs and the clatter of knives and forks in the dining-room. She was still crying and drying her eyes with a handkerchief under her veil.

"Imagine," she went on, "he is terribly helpless, he is no good at meeting force with force. Now and again he bangs the table and tells me to go to the devil—yes, he calls me names, says that I'm ruining him and that I'm worse than coarse; but the next minute he's so unhappy again and can't make up his mind to let me go. What am I to do when I see how weak he is? I put off leaving him from day to day, though I'm far from comfortable.— But don't say you're sorry; don't you dare to show me

your impertinent pity! At any rate he's better than most and has made me happier than any other man, happier than you made me. I love him as well as ever, so now you know it. I didn't come here to speak ill of him. When I go home and meet him, I shall go down on my knees and beg his forgiveness for what I've just said of him here. Yes, I shall!"

Nagel said: "My dear Kamma, do be sensible! Let me help you, do you hear? I believe you want it. Won't you let me? It's not nice of you to refuse when I can afford it as well as I can now and when I'm ready to do it."

So saying, he took out his wallet. She cried in a fury: "Didn't I say no? Can't you hear, man?"

"Then what *do* you want?" he said in dismay.

She sat up in her chair and stopped crying. She seemed to regret her impetuosity.

"Listen, Simonsen—let me call you Simonsen once more, and if you won't be angry, I should like to say something. What idea is this of yours to come and stay in a place like this, and what in the world made you do it? Do you think it surprising that people say you're mad? I don't even remember the name of the town without stopping to think, it's so small; and here you are keeping up a game of bluff and astonishing the inhabitants with your crotchety notions. Couldn't you really find something better to do?—Well, it doesn't concern me; I only say it out of old—— Oh, what do you think I could do for my chest? It feels nearly ready to burst. Don't you think I'll have to go to a doctor again? But how in God's name am I to go to a doctor when I haven't got a penny?"

"But I shall be so heartily glad to supply you; you know, you can repay me some time."

"Oh, I expect it's all the same whether I go to a doctor or not," she went on like a self-willed child. "Who would

mourn for me if I died?"—But suddenly she changed her tone, seemed to hesitate, and said: "On second thoughts, why shouldn't I take your money? Why not now just as well as before? I'm not so excessively rich that I should—— But now you've taken care time after time to offer me money at a moment when I was irritated, so that you knew beforehand I should refuse it. Oh yes, you have! You've calculated on it, simply to save your money, though you have such a lot of it now; do you think I haven't seen it? And even if you offer it me again, once more, you do it to humiliate me and triumph over my being forced at last to accept it. But it can't be helped, I accept it all the same and am grateful to you. Would to God I could do without you! But you must know, it wasn't for this I came here to-day; it wasn't for the sake of the money, believe me or not. I can't imagine you're vulgar enough to think that—— But how much can you spare, Simonsen? Goodness, you mustn't mind my asking, and now you can see I'm frank——"

"How much do you want?"

"Ah, how much do I want!—Gracious, I'm not missing the boat, am I?—Perhaps I want a lot, but—— Perhaps several hundred crowns, but——"

"Look here, you needn't feel at all humiliated in accepting this money; if you liked, you could earn it. You could do me an immense service, if I might ask you——"

"If you might ask me!" she cried, wild with delight at this way of escape. "Goodness, how you talk! What service? What service, Simonsen? I'm ready for anything. Oh, my dearest boy!"

"You still have three-quarters of an hour before the boat goes——"

"Yes; and what am I to do?"

"You're to call on a lady and do a piece of business."

"A lady?"

"She lives down by the quay in a little one-storeyed house. There are no curtains to the windows, but as a rule there are some white flowers. The lady's name is Martha Gude, Fröken Gude."

"But is she the one—then it's not Fru Stenersen——?"

"Look here, you're on the wrong track; Fröken Gude must be about forty. But she has a chair, an old arm-chair, that I've made up my mind to get possession of, and you must help me.—But now put your money away and meantime I'll tell you all about it."

Dusk was coming on; the hotel visitors left the dining-room noisily and Nagel was still going into details about the old arm-chair. She would have to set to work cautiously; it was no use going at it point-blank. Kamma grew more and more eager to get away; this underhand mission delighted her; she laughed aloud and kept asking whether she oughtn't to disguise herself a little, to wear spectacles at any rate. Didn't he once have a red hat? She might put that on.—

"No, no, you're not to play any tricks. You've simply got to bid for the chair, to send up the price; you must go up to two hundred crowns—two hundred and twenty crowns. And you needn't be afraid you'll be stuck with it; you won't get it."

"Gracious, what a lot of money! And why shouldn't I get it for two hundred and twenty crowns?"

"Because I've already secured it."

"But suppose she takes me at my word?"

"She won't take you at your word. Now go."

Even at the last moment she asked him again for a comb and expressed concern at her skirt being crushed. "But I'm not going to stand your spending so much time with that Fru Stenersen," she said coquettishly. "I won't have it; I shall be inconsolable."—And she looked once more to see if the money was safe. "How sweet of you

to give me all that money!" she exclaimed. And with a rapid gesture she threw up her veil and kissed him on the lips, full on the lips. But all the time she was full of her strange errand to Martha Gude and asked: "How can I let you know that all has gone well? I can ask the captain to whistle, if you like, whistle four or five times; wouldn't that do? There, you see, I'm not so stupid. Rely on me! And isn't it the least I can do for you when you've— Listen, it was *not* for the money that I came to-day, believe me! Well, now let me thank you once more. So long!"

Once more she felt for the money.

And in fact half an hour later Nagel heard a steam-whistle give five short blasts in succession.

XIII

A COUPLE of days went by.

Nagle stayed at home, hanging about with black looks, and seemed tormented and worried; in these two days his eyes had turned quite dull. Nor did he speak to anyone, not even to the people of the house. He had a rag tied round one hand; one night when he had been out as usual till towards morning he came home with this hand bound up in his handkerchief. The two wounds in it he explained by saying he had fallen over a harrow that had been left on the quay.

On Thursday morning it rained, and the unpleasant weather aggravated his feeling of depression. However, when he had read the papers in bed and been amused by a lively scene in the French Chamber, he suddenly snapped his fingers and jumped up. To blazes with moping! The world was wide, the world was rich, was gay, was beautiful; away with sorrow!

He rang before he was fully dressed and informed Sara that he intended to ask a few people that evening, six or seven of them who knew how to put a little life into things, merry souls, Dr. Stenersen, Lawyer Hansen, the schoolmaster, and so on.

He sent out the invitations at once. Minutten answered that he would come; Deputy Reinert was also asked, but he stayed away. By five o'clock they were all assembled in Nagel's room. As it was still raining and dark, the lamp was lighted and the blinds pulled down.

And then began the bacchanal, a revel and infernal racket that gave the little town something to talk about for many days to come—

As soon as Minutten appeared, Nagel went up to him and asked his pardon for talking such a lot of nonsense at their last meeting. He took Minutten's hand and pressed it cordially, and he introduced him to the young student, Oien, who was the only one that did not know him. Minutten thanked him in a whisper for the new trousers; now he was new from top to toe.

"You have no waistcoat yet."

"No, but that's not necessary. I'm not a lord; I assure you I have no use for a waistcoat."

Dr. Stenersen had broken his glasses and was using a *pince-nez* without a string, which fell off every minute.

"No, you can say what you like," he said; "but it's an age of liberation we live in. Look at the elections now. And compare them with the last time."

They all drank hard; the schoolmaster was already using words of one syllable, which was a sure sign. But Lawyer Hansen, who certainly had had a few glasses before he came, began as usual to contradict the Doctor and raise trouble.

Hansen for his part was a Socialist; a rather advanced one, if he might say so. He was not very well satisfied with the elections; what kind of liberation did they really point to, could anyone tell him that? Go to hell! Oh, it was a lovely age of liberation! Didn't they see even a man like Gladstone attacking the wretched Parnell on moral grounds, on ridiculous bread-and-butter moral grounds? Go to hell!

"What damned nonsense are you talking?" shouted the Doctor at once. "Don't you want morality in Parliament? If people heard there was no morality in parliaments, how many would you get to swallow them?" You had to educate the people by fooling and make-believe and you had to see that morality was respected. The Doctor thought a lot of Parnell, but if Gladstone found him

impossible then one had to admit that he was a man who knew what he was about. Except of course Herr Nagel, his honoured host, who couldn't even forgive Gladstone for keeping his hands clean. "Ha ha ha, good God!—By the way, Herr Nagel, you have no great opinion of Tolstoy either? I heard from Fröken Kielland that you had some scruples about acknowledging him too."

Nagel was talking to Oien; he turned quickly and replied: "I don't remember talking to Fröken Kielland about Tolstoy. I acknowledge him as a great novelist and a fool in philosophy."—But a moment later he added: "I say, we must allow ourselves a certain freedom in our language this evening, I think; we're only men here and we're in a bachelor's diggings. Is that agreed? I'm just in the mood for it; I'd like to get my claws into something and growl."

"Go ahead!" said the Doctor, hurt. "Tolstoy is a fool."

"That's right, let's say what we think!" the schoolmaster suddenly joined in. He had just reached the right stage of intoxication and shied at nothing from now on. "No restrictions, Doctor, or we'll put you out. Every man's entitled to his opinion; Stöcker for instance is an almighty scoundrel. I can prove it—prove it!" *

They all laughed at this and it was a little while before they could return to Tolstoy. He was a great writer and a great intellect.

Nagel's face flamed up: "A great intellect he is not. In its nature and quality his intellect is as ordinary as it can possibly be, and his teaching is not a whit more profound than the hallelucinations of the Salvation Army. A Russian who hadn't his rank, his ancient and noble name, his cool million of roubles, would hardly have won fame by teaching a few peasants to patch their shoes.—

* Adolf Stöcker, German court preacher and religious writer, whose views gave rise to some controversy in the eighties.—Tr.

But let's leave that alone and be a little festive. Your health, Herr Grögaard!"

At short intervals Nagel took the opportunity of clinking glasses with Minutten and generally paid him great attention throughout the evening. Once more he referred to his ramblings the last time they met and asked Minutten to forget them.

"For my part I decline to be startled by anything you say," said the Doctor, bracing himself up.

"I have a bad habit of contradicting at times," Nagel went on; "and this evening I'm more than ever in the vein for it. That's partly due to a couple of disagreeable incidents which hit me rather hard the day before yesterday, and partly to this depressing weather, which I simply can't stand. You will understand that, Doctor, and excuse it.—Talking of Tolstoy, I am unable to find his intellect any deeper than, say, General Booth's. They're both preachers; not thinkers but preachers. They deal in existing products, popularize an idea which they find ready-made, vulgarize it in cheap form, and raise a din in the world. But if you're going to deal in an article you must do so with a profit. Tolstoy's turnover shows a staggering loss. There were two friends who made a bet one day: one of them bet a shilling he'd shoot a nut out of the other's hand at twenty paces without damaging the hand. Good; he fired, made a rotten shot, blew his friend's hand to pieces and did it in style. Then the other groaned out as he fainted away: 'You lost the bet, out with your shilling!' And he got the shilling. 'Out with your shilling,' he said! God help me, how Tolstoy sweats away to pump out humanity's jolly death-springs and leave the world muddy with love of God and one's neighbour! It fills me with inward shame. It may sound impertinent of an agronomist to talk of being ashamed of a count, but I am.—I should have nothing to say about

it if Tolstoy were a young man with temptations to overcome, a battle to fight, by preaching virtue and leading a clean life. But, you see, the man's old; his sources are dried up; he hasn't a scrap of human inclination left. But, you may say, that doesn't tell against his teaching. Yes, it does tell against his teaching too! You wait till you're tough and watertight with old age, till you're fed up and callous with indulgence, and then you go to the young man and say, 'Renounce!' And the young man turns it over and sleeps on it and admits that it's all right according to the Scriptures. All the same, the young man doesn't renounce, but sins imperially for forty years. That's the way of nature. But when the forty years are done and the young man himself is a veteran, he too saddles his milk-white steed and rides away with the crusader's banner aloft in his bony hand, trumpeting his pious message of renunciation to the youth of the world. It's an ever-recurring comedy! Tolstoy tickles my brains; I'm delighted that the old man can still do so much good; he'll end sure enough by entering into the joy of his Lord! But after all he's simply and solely repeating what so many a greybeard has done before him and so many another will do after him. That's all it is."

"Let me just remind you—to say no more—that Tolstoy has shown himself a true friend of the forlorn and needy; do you think that counts for nothing at all? Show me the magnate in this country who has looked after the humble members of the community as he has. It's a fairly arrogant view, in my opinion, that because Tolstoy's teaching is not followed, it's to be classed with that of fools."

"Bravo, Doctor!" roared the schoolmaster again, red as fire. "Bravo! But say it sharper, be a bit rude. Every man's entitled to his opinion. An arrogant view, just so, an arrogant view of yours! I can prove it——"

"Your health!" said Nagel. "Don't let's forget what we're here for. Do you really mean to say, Doctor, that it's worthy of any admiration to give away a ten-rouble note when you have a cool million left? I don't follow your reasoning and that of everyone else; I must be differently constructed. If my life was at stake, I can't see that anyone—least of all a rich man—deserves to be admired for giving charity."

"That's good!" remarked Hansen provocatively. "I'm a Socialist; that's my point of view."

But this irritated the Doctor, who turned to Nagel and exclaimed: "May I ask, have you really such accurate information as to how much Tolstoy gives away in charity in the course of the year? There ought to be some limit to what one can assert, even in a bachelor party."

"And for Tolstoy," replied Nagel, "the question was this: there must be a certain limit to what I give away! On which account he made his wife take the blame for not letting him give more! Well, we'll pass that over.—But look here, does one really give away a crown because one is good, or because one thinks one's doing a good and moral deed thereby? What a naïve view this seems to me! There are some people who can't help giving. Why? Because it brings them a genuine psychic enjoyment. They don't do it from logical calculation; they do it on the sly; they detest doing it openly because that would take away a lot of the pleasure. They do it in secret, with trembling, hurrying hands, with panting chest and a spiritual comfort that they don't understand themselves. It suddenly occurs to them to give something away; it takes the form of a sensation in the chest, an instantaneous and queer impulse that springs up within them and floods their eyes with tears. They don't give from kindness of heart but from instinct, for the sake of their personal comfort; some people are like that. You

talk about free-handed people with admiration—as I say, I must be differently constructed from the rest of the world, but I don't admire free-handed people. No, I don't. Who the devil wouldn't rather give than receive? May I ask if there is a human being on earth who wouldn't rather relieve want than suffer it? To take yourself as an example, Doctor; the other night you gave five crowns to a man who had rowed you. I happened to hear it. Well, why did you give away those five crowns? Certainly not to do an act pleasing to God; I'm sure that never occurred to you; perhaps the man didn't even want it so very badly, but you did it all the same. The fact is, at that moment you simply yielded to a bright impulse within you to get rid of something and give pleasure to others.—It seems to me so unspeakably shabby to make a fuss about human beneficence. You walk along the street one day; the weather is thus and thus, and you see such and such people, all of which works up in you a mood of such and such a kind. Suddenly your eyes fall on a face, a child's face, a beggar's face—let us say a beggar's face—which gives you a palpitation. A strange feeling thrills your soul and you stamp your foot and stop dead. That face has struck an unusually sensitive chord within you and you entice the beggar into a doorway and press a ten-crown note into his hand. 'If you give me away by so much as a word, I'll kill you!' you whisper, and you almost grind your teeth and shed tears of excitement as you say it. So keen are you to keep it dark. And this may repeat itself day after day till you often find yourself in an awkward fix without a penny in your pocket.—I'm not talking about myself, of course; but I know a man, another man; well, for that matter I know two men who are so constituted.—No, one gives because one has to give, and that's the end of it! But I would make an exception in the case of the misers. The misers and the grossly

stingy really make a sacrifice in giving anything away, there's no doubt of that. And therefore I will say that such folks are more praiseworthy for the farthing they reluctantly squeeze out of themselves than a man like you for the crown you indulge yourself by shedding. Tell Tolstoy with my compliments that I don't give a stiver for all his beastly parade of generosity—not until he gives away all he possesses, and not even then.—I beg pardon, by the by, if I've hurt anybody's feelings. Another cigar, Herr Grögaard. Doctor, your health!"

Pause.

"How many do you think you'll succeed in converting in the course of your life?" asked the Doctor.

"Bravo!" cried the schoolmaster. "Bravo from Schoolmaster Holtan!"

"I?" replied Nagel. "None—none at all. If I had to live by converting people, I should soon starve. But what I simply can't grasp is that everybody else doesn't think the same about things as I do. Consequently I must be the one that's most wrong. But not entirely wrong; I can't possibly be entirely wrong."

"But I've never yet heard you acknowledge anything or any man," said the Doctor. "It would be interesting to know whether there isn't someone that even you can put up with."

"Let me explain myself a little; I'll do it in two words. What you really mean is this: look out, he has no one to look up to; he is the personification of arrogance; he can't put up with anybody! That is a mistake. My brain is not a very comprehensive one; it doesn't reach very far, but I could reckon up hundreds and again hundreds of these ordinary, acknowledged great men who fill the world with their renown. My ears are full of them. But I should prefer to name the two, four, six greatest heroes of the mind, demigods, gigantic creators of values, and for

the rest confine myself to a few purely insignificant ones, rare and exceptional geniuses who are never talked about, who live a short time and die young and unknown. I dare say I should include a rather large proportion of such. But I am certain I should forget Tolstoy."

"Listen," said the Doctor contemptuously, to put an end to it—he even gave an emphatic shrug of the shoulders —"do you really think that a man could attain to a world renown like Tolstoy's without being an intellect of high rank? It's extraordinarily amusing to listen to you, but you're talking nonsense. Devil take me, your balderdash is enough to make one sick."

Holtan roared: "Bravo, Doctor! Don't let our host take our breath away—breath away——"

"Herr Holtan reminds me that I'm not doing my duty as host," said Nagel laughing. "But now I'll mend my ways. Herr Oien, you have nothing to drink. Why in the world aren't you drinking?"

The fact was that the student had sat like a statue the whole time, listening to the talk; he had hardly missed a word. His eyes were screwed up with curiosity and he positively pricked his ears. The young man was keenly interested. It was said that—like other students—he was working on a novel in his vacation.

Sara came with a message that supper was ready. Hansen, who had partly collapsed in his chair, suddenly opened his eyes and looked at her, and, as she left the room, he jumped up, caught her on the stairs, and said, full of admiration: "Sara, it's a treat to look at you, I must say."

After that he came back and sat down in his place as serious as before. He was well oiled. When at last Dr. Stenersen jumped upon him for his socialism, he could put up no defence at all. Oh, he was a nice Socialist! A fleecer, that's what he was, a miserable middleman between power and impotence, a lawyer who lived on other

folks' wrangling and took fees for asserting the rights of casuistry, the lawful rights! And that thing called itself a Socialist!

"Ah, but in principle, in principle," the lawyer expostulated.

"Principle!" The Doctor spoke with the deepest scorn of Lawyer Hansen's principles. While the party was on its way to the dining-room, he made one sally after another, made fun of Hansen as a lawyer and attacked socialism and all its ways. The Doctor was a Liberal, body and soul, not a Socialist by right of jaw. What were the socialistic principles? To hell with them!—The Doctor was now on his hobby: to put it briefly, socialism was the lower class's great revenge idea. Look at socialism as a movement: a crowd of blind and deaf brutes trotting after their leader with their tongues hanging out. Did they think beyond the tip of their nose? No, people didn't think. If they did, they'd go over to the Liberal party and accomplish something useful and practical instead of drivelling over a dream all their lives. Faugh! Take anyone you like of the Socialist leaders, what sort of men were they? Shabby, skinny fellows who sat on a wooden stool in a garret writing essays for the reforming of the world! "They might be decent men, of course; who could say anything else of Karl Marx? But there he sat, this Marx fellow, scribbling poverty out of existence—theoretically. His brain has thought out every kind of penury, every degree of misery; his head is full of all the sufferings of mankind. Then he dips his pen in the ink and writes in the ardour of the spirit one page after another, fills big sheets with figures, takes from the rich and gives to the poor, shares out the money, turns the whole world's economics topsyturvy, flings milliards among the astonished poor—the whole thing scientifically, in theory! And then

at the end of all it appears that in his innocence he has started with a fundamentally false principle—that all men are equal! Faugh! A fundamentally false principle if you like! Instead of turning his hand to something useful and supporting the Liberal party in its work of reform for the advancement of true democracy——"

By degrees the Doctor in his turn was getting hotter about the head and indulged in a variety of figures of speech. At table he was even worse; a quantity of champagne was drunk and excitement rose to a wild pitch: even Minutten, who sat by Nagel and had hitherto been silent, took part in the conversation with a few remarks. The schoolmaster sat stiff as a post, shouting again and again about an egg that had been spilt over his clothes so that he couldn't move. He was perfectly helpless. But when Sara came to clean up the mess, Lawyer Hansen seized the opportunity to make a grab at her, took her in his arms, and started screaming over her. The whole table was in an uproar.

In the middle of all this Nagel ordered a basket of champagne to be taken up to his room, and soon after, they rose from the table. The schoolmaster and the lawyer walked arm in arm singing from sheer hilarity and the Doctor began to hold forth again in an eager tone about the principles of socialism. But going upstairs he had the misfortune to drop his *pince-nez,* which fell off for the tenth time at least and finally went to pieces; both glasses were smashed. He pocketed the frame and was then half blind for the rest of the evening. This annoyed him and increased his irritation; he sat down angrily by Nagel and said caustically: "Unless I'm mistaken, you're a religious man?"

He said this quite seriously and waited for an answer. After a little pause he went on to say that from their first

conversation—on the day of Karlsen's funeral—he had gathered the impression that he—Nagel—really was a religious man.

"I stood up for the religious *life* in man," Nagel replied; "not for Christianity in particular, not by any means, but for religious life in general. You expressed the opinion that all theologians ought to be hanged. 'Why,' I asked. 'Because they're played out,' you answered. And I didn't agree with that. Religious life is a fact. A Turk cries: 'Allah is great!' and dies for this conviction; a Norwegian kneels at the altar and drinks the blood of Christ to this day. Somewhere or other you'll find a people believing in a cow-bell and attaining salvation in that belief. For the thing that matters is not *what* you believe in, but *how* you believe in it—"

"I'm astonished to hear such stuff," said the Doctor, scandalized. "I must really ask myself once more whether after all you are not merely a Conservative in disguise. Here we have one scientific criticism after another of theologians and theological books, one author after another comes forward and makes mincemeat of a collection of sermons or a theological treatise, and yet you don't shrink from asserting that a comedy like that of Christ's blood still holds good in our days. I can't understand your line of thought."

Nagel reflected a moment and said: "My line of thought is briefly this: What do we really gain—excuse me if I may have asked the same question before—what do we really gain, even in a purely practical sense, by stripping life of all poetry, all dreams, all beautiful mysticism, all lies? What is truth? can you tell me that? We only advance by means of symbols, and we change these symbols as we progress. Don't let us forget our glasses, by the way."

The Doctor got up and paced across the room. He looked irritably at a crumpled piece of carpet by the door and even went down on his knees to smooth it out.

"I say, you might lend me your glasses, Hansen, as you're doing nothing but sleep," he said with positive resentment.

But Hansen wouldn't part with his glasses and the Doctor turned from him in disgust. He sat down again beside Nagel.

"Yes, it's all rubbish," he said; "it's really trash, the whole thing, seen from your point of view. I dare say you're not so far wrong. Look at Hansen, there; excuse me for taking a laugh out of you, Hansen, Lawyer and Socialist Hansen. I suppose you don't feel a certain inward joy every time two good citizens fall out and go to law with each other, do you? No, nothing of the kind, you'd try to make an amiable compromise, you would, and not take a penny for it! And next Sunday you'd go up to the Workers' Union as usual and give a lecture to two artizans and a butcher boy on the Socialist State. That's it, every man is to receive a return according to his capacity for producing, you'd say, everything is so excellently arranged and nobody will be treated unjustly. But then the butcher boy gets up, the butcher boy who, save the mark, is a genius in comparison to all the rest of you; he gets up and asks: 'But now you see I've got a banker's capacity for consuming, but I'm only a poor butcher boy at producing, because that's all the talents I've got,' he says. I suppose that wouldn't floor you, silly ass?—Ah, snore away, that's the best thing you can do, snore away!"—The Doctor was heavily intoxicated, his tongue tripped sadly and his eyes were swimming. After a pause he turned again to Nagel and resumed gloomily: "For that matter I didn't mean it was only the theologians who ought

to make away with themselves. No, curse it, that's what we all ought to do; clear out the whole world; let it all rip."

Nagel clinked glasses with Minutten. The Doctor was savage at being given no answer and shouted loudly: "Don't you hear what I say? We ought all to kill ourselves, I say; you too, of course, you too."

And the Doctor had quite a bloodthirsty look as he said it.

"Yes," replied Nagel, "I've had the same idea. But as for myself, I haven't the courage."—Pause.—"I'm far from saying I have the courage to do it; but if I *should* be brave enough one day, I have the pistol ready. And in case of emergency I always carry it on me."

And he took out of his waistcoat pocket a little medicine bottle marked "Poison" and held it up. The bottle was only half full.

"Genuine prussic acid, finest vintage!" he said. "But I shall never have the courage; it's too stiff a job for me.—Doctor, you can tell me if there's enough here. I've used half of it already on an animal and it worked first-rate. A few spasms, a comic contortion of the mouth, two or three gasps, that was all; mate in three moves."

The Doctor took the bottle, looked at it, shook it a few times and said: "That's enough, more than enough.—I ought really to take it away from you; but if you haven't the courage——"

"No, I haven't the courage."

Pause. Nagel returned the bottle to his waistcoat pocket. The Doctor was gradually collapsing; he took sips at his glass, looked around him with lifeless eyes, and spat over the floor. All at once he called to the schoolmaster: "Hey, how far have you got, Holtan? Can you still manage 'association of ideas?' I can't. Good night!"

The schoolmaster opened his eyes, stretched himself,

got up, and went to the window, where he stood looking out. When the talk started again, he took the opportunity of getting away; he stole quietly along the wall, got the door open, and slipped out before anyone noticed him. That was Holtan's usual way of leaving a party.

Minutten got up too and wanted to go, but on being asked to stay a little longer he sat down again. Lawyer Hansen was asleep. The three who were still sober, Oien, Minutten, and Nagel, then began to discuss literature. The Doctor listened with half-open eyes, but said not a word more. Very soon he too was asleep.

The student was a great reader and stuck up for Maupassant: they must admit that Maupassant had penetrated woman's inmost secrets and was unapproachable as the poet of love. What boldness of description, what wonderful knowledge of the human heart! But Nagel blazed up in a ridiculous way, banged the table, blustered, attacked authors all round, made almost a clean sweep of them, and only spared very few alive. He seemed quite sincere in his vehemence; his chest heaved and he foamed at the mouth:

Poets! Oh, you might well say they had penetrated to the depths of the human heart! What were these poets, these bumptious creatures who had contrived to make themselves so important in modern life; what were they? Why, they were an eruption, a lot of scabs on the social body, bloated, irritable pimples that had to be treated gently, handled with tender discretion, lest they break out badly; they couldn't stand harsh treatment! Oh yes, you simply had to make a great fuss over poets, especially the stupid ones, those that were stunted in their human development, the gnomes; failing that, they went and sulked in foreign countries. In foreign countries! Good Lord, what a priceless comedy it was! And if you *had* a poet, a genuine inspired singer with musical notes in his chest,

you could bet your life he'd be placed a long way below a crude, book-making professional like Maupassant. A man who had written at length about love and shown that he could turn out books; oh yes, honour where honour is due! Ah, a bright little twinkling star, a real poet within his own range, Alfred de Musset, with whom love was not a cut-and-dried, rutting affair but a delicate, ardent note of springtime, and who could positively make the words blaze in his lines—this poet perhaps hadn't half as many faithful on his side as little Maupassant with his extraordinary crude and soulless jig-saw poetry.—

Nagel stopped at nothing; he even found a chance of going for Victor Hugo and left the greatest reputations without a leg to stand on. Might he be permitted to bring forward just one little sample of a great poet's empty roaring? Listen: "Would that thy steel were as sharp as thy final No!" What did they think of that, didn't it sound fine? What did Herr Grögaard think?

Saying this, Nagel turned a penetrating glance on Minutten. He continued to stare at him and repeated this drivelling line once more, with his eyes still fixed on Minutten's face. Minutten made no reply; his blue eyes opened in dismay, and in his confusion he took a big pull at his glass.

"You mentioned Ibsen," Nagel went on as excitedly as before, though no one had mentioned Ibsen's name. In his opinion there was only one poet in Norway, and that was *not* Ibsen. No, it was not. People talked about Ibsen as a thinker—wouldn't it be better to distinguish between popular argument and real thinking? People talked about Ibsen's fame; they dinned his courage into our ears; but wouldn't it be better to distinguish between theoretical and practical courage, between an altruistic, reckless, revolutionary spirit and domestic rebelliousness? One sheds a radiance on life; the other dazzles you in the theatre.

The Norwegian author who didn't puff himself up and wield a bodkin for a lance was no genuine Norwegian author; he must find some gate-post on which to fling himself if he wanted to be thought a plucky little chap. Ah, it was really most amusing, looked at from a distance; there was as much noise and prowess as in one of Napoleon's battles, and the risk was no greater than in a French duel!—No, a man who wanted to raise a revolt didn't have to be a little writing oddity, a purely literary concept for the appreciation of Germans, but an active human being, struggling in the turmoil of life. You might be sure Ibsen's revolutionary courage would never take its man on to thin ice; all that about "torpedoing the Ark" was a wretched departmental theory compared with live and fiery deeds. Well, after all, perhaps one thing was as good as another, seeing that we all fell on our faces before such woman's work as sitting and writing books for people. Miserable as it might be, at any rate it was worth as much as Leo Tolstoy's impudent philosophical twaddle. Devil take the lot!

"What, all of it?"

Well, almost. For that matter, we had one poet, and that was Björnson at his best. But he was our only one.—

But would not most of his objections to Tolstoy also apply to Björnson? Wasn't Björnson nothing but a propagandist, a preacher of morality, an ordinary old bore, a book-making professional, and all the rest of it?

"No!" cried Nagel in a loud voice. He defended Björnson with gesticulation and violent language. You couldn't compare Björnson and Tolstoy, because for one thing it would be contrary to one's sound, agronomic good sense and for another it would be revolting to one's human instincts. In the first place Björnson was a genius just as much as Tolstoy. Nagel did not rank the usual

run of great, ordinary geniuses very high—God knew he didn't—but Tolstoy had raised himself to their level, whereas Björnson had far surpassed them. Of course this didn't prevent Tolstoy's being able to make books which were better than many of Björnson's; but what did that prove? Good books could be made even by Danish captains, Norwegian painters, or English women. In the second place Björnson was a man, an overwhelming personality, not a mere concept. "He bustles about our globe as a living body and wants elbow-room for forty. He doesn't sit like a sphinx making himself great and mysterious in people's eyes, like Tolstoy on his steppe, or Ibsen in his café. The inside of Björnson's head is like a forest in a gale of wind; he's a fighter; he's on the war-path everywhere and does glorious damage to his own interests with the Grand Café public. He is constructed on a grand scale; he's a commanding spirit, one of the few with authority. He can face a meeting and check the first sign of booing with a wave of his hand. He has a brain that is incessantly germinating and teeming; he triumphs mightily or fails grievously, but whichever it is, he does it with personality and spirit. Björnson is our only poet with inspiration, with the divine spark. It begins with him like the soughing of a cornfield on a summer day, and it ends in your hearing nothing, nothing but his voice; thus his soul moves by gathering impetus—the motion of genius. Compared with Björnson's, the poetry of Ibsen, for instance, is purely mechanical office work. Ibsen's verse consists for a great part in rhyme answering rhyme with a snap; most of his plays are dramatized woodpulp. What the devil did people mean—— Oh well, it's all the same; here's a health to everybody——"

It was two o'clock. Minutten was yawning; sleepy after a hard day's work, tired and bored with Nagel's endless chatter, he got up again to go. However, when he had

said good-bye and had already reached the door, something happened to stop him again, a subtle little accident which was destined to have the weightiest consequences: the Doctor woke up, threw out his arm suddenly, and in his short-sightedness upset several glasses; Nagel, who sat next him, was drenched with champagne. He jumped up with a laugh, shook his wet clothes, and gave a wild cheer.

Minutten at once offered his services; he came running up to Nagel with handkerchiefs and towels to dry him. The waistcoat had got most of it; if he would just take it off a moment, only a minute, he would soon put it right. But Nagel wouldn't take off his waistcoat. The lawyer woke up with the noise and began to cheer too, without knowing what was happening. Once more Minutten asked to have the waistcoat a moment; Nagel only shook his head. Suddenly he turned his eyes on Minutten; something occurred to him; he rose instantly, pulled off his waistcoat, and handed it to him impulsively.

"Here you are," he said. "Dry it and keep it. Oh yes, you're to keep it; you haven't any waistcoat, you know. Now no nonsense! You're heartily welcome to it, my friend."—But as Minutten still remonstrated, Nagel shoved the waistcoat under his arm, opened the door, and pushed him out.

And Minutten went.

This passed so rapidly that Oien, who sat next the door, was the only one who observed it.

Then Lawyer Hansen proposed in his reckless humour that they should smash the rest of the glasses. Nagel made no objection, and so four grown-up men proceeded to amuse themselves by shying glass after glass at the wall. After that they drank out of the bottles, roared like drunken sailors, and danced around. It was four o'clock before the spree came to an end. The Doctor was then

excessively drunk. As he was leaving, Oien turned again and said to Nagel: "But what you said about Tolstoy applies just as much to Björnson. You're not consistent in what you say.—"

"Ha ha ha!" laughed the Doctor, like one possessed. "He expects consistency—at this time of night!—Can you say 'encyclopædists,' young man? 'Associated ideas?' Come on, let me help you home.—Ha ha, at this time of night!—"

It had stopped raining. There was no sun, but the weather was calm and it looked like a mild day.

XIV

EARLY next morning Minutten turned up again at the hotel. He went quietly into Nagel's room, laid his watch, some papers, a stump of pencil, and the little poison bottle on the table, and was going out again, but as Nagel woke up at that moment, he had to stay and explain what had brought him.

"They're the things I found in your waistcoat pockets," said he.

"In my waistcoat pockets? Why yes, damn it, I forgot! And what's o'clock?"

"Eight. But your watch has stopped; I didn't like to wind it."

"You haven't drunk all the prussic acid, have you?"

Minutten smiled and shook his head.

"No," he answered.

"Not even tasted it? The bottle ought to be half full; let me see."

And Minutten let him see that the bottle was still half full.

"Good! And it's eight o'clock? Then it's time to get up.—While I think of it, Grögaard, can you borrow a violin for me? I want to try if I can learn to—— Bosh! The truth is, I want to *buy* a violin to give away to a friend; it's not for myself I want it. So you'll really have to find me a violin, wherever you get it from."

Minutten would do his very best.

"Many thanks. Then you'll look me up again when you feel inclined; you know the way. Good-morning."

An hour later Nagel was already in the parsonage wood.

The ground was still wet from the rain of the day before, and the sun was not very warm. He sat down on a stone and kept a sharp look-out along the road. He had seen a couple of familiar footprints in the moist gravel; he was almost convinced they were Dagny's footprints and that she had gone into the town. He waited in vain for a good while, decided at last to go and meet her, and rose from the stone.

And he was not mistaken; he met her before he was out of the wood. She was carrying a book, Skram's *Gertrude Colbjörnsen.**

They talked of this book at first, and then she said: "Would you believe it—our dog is dead."

"Is it?" he replied.

"A few days ago. We found him stone-dead. I can't imagine how it happened."

"Fancy, I always thought it was a horrid brute of a dog you had; beg pardon, you know, but one of those flat-nosed mastiffs with an impudent human look about them. When he looked at you the corners of his mouth hung down as if all the troubles of the world were on him. I'm downright glad he's dead."

"Fie, for shame——"

But he nervously cut her short; for some reason or other he was anxious to get away from this subject of the dog as soon as possible. He started talking about a man he had once met who was one of the most comical persons you ever came across. "The man s-stammered a little and made no attempt to disguise it, not he; in fact he s-stammered worse than he need have done, just to show off his infirmity. He had the queerest ideas about women.

* This novel by the Danish writer Erik Skram appeared in 1879 and scandalized the public of that day by its "realism." As a study of a girl's psychology it is a landmark in Scandinavian literature.—Tr.

There was a story he used to tell about Mexico which was extraordinarily funny in the way he told it. One winter it was frightfully cold there; the thermometers cracked up gaily, and people stayed indoors day and night. But one day he had to go to the next town; he was walking through a bare tract with only a cabin here and there, and the wind scorched his face insufferably. As he was going along in this desperate cold, a half-clad woman dashed out of one of the cabins and ran after him, shouting all the time: 'You've got a frost-bite on your nose! Look out, you've got a frost-bite on your nose!' The woman had a ladle in her hand, and her sleeves were turned up; she had seen this stranger go by with a frost-bitten nose and had run from her work to warn him. Did you ever hear the like? And there she stood in the freezing wind with her sleeves tucked up, while the whole of her right cheek was attacked and turned into one huge frost-bite! Would you believe it?—But in spite of that and lots of other examples he had known of feminine self-sacrifice this stammerer was utterly bigoted on the subject of women. 'Woman is a queer and insatiable creature,' he said to me, without explaining why she was precisely queer or insatiable. 'The things she can imagine are perfectly incredible,' he said. And he told me this story: 'I had a friend who fell in love with a young lady; by the same token her name was Klara. He took a great deal of trouble to win this lady, but it was no good; Klara wouldn't have anything to say to him, though he was a handsome young man of good position. This same Klara, however, had a sister, an uncommonly mis-shapen, hunch-backed creature, who was positively hideous; to her my friend proposed one day; God in heaven knows why he did it; perhaps it was a scheme, or perhaps he really fell in love with her in spite of her hideousness. But what did Klara do? Why, here the woman in her showed claws at once; Klara shrieked, Klara kicked up the

devil's own row: "It was me he wanted! It was me he wanted!" she said; "but he won't get me; I won't have him, not for the world," she said. Well, do you think he was allowed to get the sister, whom he was now deeply in love with? No, that's just the tricky part of it; Klara wouldn't leave him to her sister either. Oh no, as it was really herself he wanted, he was not allowed to get her sister even, though she was no good to anybody. And so my friend didn't get either of the ladies.'—That was one of the many stories this stammerer told me. He had an amusing way of telling them, just because he stammered so badly. For that matter he was a great riddle of a man.—Am I boring you?"

"No," replied Dagny.

"A great riddle of a man he was. He was so miserly and at the same time such a thief that he was capable of annexing the straps from railway-carriage windows and taking them home for some purpose or other. Yes, he wouldn't stop at that; I believe he was actually caught at a theft of that kind once. But on the other hand he was utterly careless about money when the fit was on him. One day he took it into his head to get up an enormous excursion. He had no acquaintances, so he hired for himself alone twenty-four carriages, which he started off one after the other. Twenty-three of them were perfectly empty and in the twenty-fourth—the last—he sat by himself, looking down on the passers-by, proud as an emperor of the sensation he was making.—"

But Nagel had no luck, he started one subject after another, but Dagny scarcely listened to what he said. He stopped talking and reflected. Wasn't it the very devil the way he let his tongue run on and make a fool of him every time! Worrying a young lady, the lady of his heart too, with bosh about frost-bites and processions of twenty-four carriages! And he suddenly remembered that once

before he had put his foot in it badly with a silly yarn of an Eskimo and a blotter. At the thought of it his cheeks grew hot; he gave an involuntary start and very nearly stopped. Why in hell couldn't he be more careful? Oh, how ashamed he was! These idiotic fits of drivelling put him in a comic light, humiliated him, and gave him a set-back of weeks and months! What must she think of him!

He said: "And how long is it to this bazaar?"

She replied with a smile: "Why do you take so much trouble to keep on talking? What makes you so nervous?"

The question came so unexpectedly that he looked at her for a moment in confusion. He replied in a low voice, with beating heart: "Fröken Kielland, the last time I saw you I promised that if I might meet you once more I would talk about all sorts of things, but not of the forbidden subject. I am trying to keep my promise. I have kept it so far."

"Yes," she said, "we must keep our promises; we must not break our promises." And she seemed to be speaking more to herself than to him.

"Before you came I was making up my mind to try; I knew I should meet you."

"How could you know that?"

"I saw your tracks here on the road."

She threw a glance at him and said nothing.

After a few moments she said: "You have a bandage on your hand; have you been hurt?"

"Yes," he answered; "it was your dog that bit me."

They both halted and looked at each other. He wrung his hands and continued in great distress: "I've been in this wood every single night; I've looked at your windows every night before I went to bed. Forgive me, it is no crime! You forbade me to do it, but I've done it and it can't be helped. The dog bit me too, when he was fighting for his life; I killed him; I gave him poison because he

always barked when I came to say good-night to your windows."

"So it was you who killed the dog!" she said.

"Yes," he answered.

Pause. They still stood looking at each other; his chest was heaving violently.

"And I am capable of doing much worse things to get a sight of you," he went on. "You have no idea how I'm suffering, how my mind is full of you night and day; no, you have no idea of it. I talk to people, I laugh, I even give jovial drinking parties—I had one last night till four in the morning; we ended up by smashing all the glasses —well then, all the time I'm drinking and singing I think of nothing but you, and it turns me crazy. I'm letting everything slide too, and don't know what's to happen to me. Have pity on me just for two minutes; I must tell you something. But don't be afraid; I'm not going to scare you, or coax you either, only I must talk to you because it's on my mind——"

"But are you never going to be sensible?" she said abruptly. "You promised you would be."

"Yes, I dare say I did; I don't know, but perhaps I promised to be sensible. But it's so hard for me. Well, I'll be sensible; depend upon it. But how am I to do it? can you tell me? Teach me how. Do you know that one day I was on the point of forcing my way into the parsonage, opening the doors, and going straight in to you, even if you had several callers! But I tried with all my might to resist it, you may be sure; in fact I even spoke ill of you and tried to destroy your power over me by depreciating you in the eyes of others. I didn't do it for revenge; no, you can see I'm near the breaking-point. I did it to assert myself, to teach myself to set my teeth and show a stiff upper lip in my own sight. That's why I did it. But I'm not sure that it's any use. I've also tried to go

away; I began to pack all my things; but I didn't finish and I didn't go either. How could I go! I'd be more likely to go in search of you if you were not here. And if I never found you, I should go on following you and searching for you in the hope of finding you at last. But when I saw that it was no use after all, I would cut down my hope little by little, till at last I should be intensely grateful if I could only see someone who had once been near you, some woman friend who had pressed your hand or received a smile from you in the good days. That is what I would do. How can I then leave here? Besides, it's summer now, the whole wood is my church, and the birds know me; they look at me every morning when I come; they cock their heads and look at me and then start singing. I shall never forget how all the flags were flying in your honour the first evening I came; it made the strongest impression on me; I became positively possessed of a rare sympathy, and I walked about the ship in a half-conscious state looking at the flags before I landed. Ah, that evening!—But since then again I have had many a glorious hour; every day I walk the same roads as you, and sometimes I am lucky enough to see your tracks on the road, as I did to-day, and then I wait till you come past again; I hide myself in the wood and lie down flat behind a stone and wait for you. I have seen you twice since I last spoke to you, and once I waited six hours before you came. I lay for six whole hours behind the stone and did not get up, simply for fear you might come and catch sight of me. God knows what kept you so long that day.—"

"I was at the Andresens'," she said suddenly.

"Well, perhaps you were; anyhow I saw you at last when you came. You were not alone; but I saw you quite clearly and I sent you a whispered greeting from behind the stone. God knows what it was that went through your

mind at that moment, but you turned your head and glanced at the stone——"

"Now, look here—— Why, you start as if I was going to pronounce sentence of death——"

"So you are; I know that very well; your eyes turned to ice."

"Well, but we must really have an end of this, Herr Nagel! If you think it over, you must see yourself that you are not behaving very nicely to one who is absent. Put yourself in his place—to say nothing of the painful position you put me in. What is it you want me to do? Let me tell you once for all, I shall not break my promise; *I love him.* There, that must be plain enough for you. Be a little careful now; I really won't walk with you unless you can show me a little consideration. I tell you straight out."

She was moved, her lips quivered, and she made a great effort not to burst into tears. As Nagel said nothing she added: "You may see me home, all the way home, if you like and if you won't make things uncomfortable for both of us. If you would tell me a story, I should be grateful; I like hearing you talk."

"Ah," he said at once in a loud voice, exulting like any chatterer let loose, "ah, if I may but be with you! I'll be sure—— Oh, what a cold douche you gave me! how you positively brace me up when you're angry with me——"

For a long time they talked of indifferent things, walking so slowly that they covered hardly any ground.

"What a scent, what a scent!" he said. "Ah, how the grass and the flowers grow after rain! I don't know if you're interested in trees? It's strange, but I feel mysteriously akin to every tree in the forest. It is as though I had once belonged to the woods; when I stand here and look around, a sort of memory flashes through my whole be-

ing. Oh, stop a moment! Listen! Listen how triumphantly the birds are greeting the sunshine. They're perfectly crazy; they almost fly in our faces and don't look where they're going."

They walked on.

"I still think," she said, "of that charming fancy of yours of the boat with a silken sail in the shape of a half-moon. It was so pretty. When the sky is really deep and far away, I imagine myself rocking on its bosom and fishing with a silver hook."

He was delighted at her remembering this Midsummer Eve fancy, his eyes grew moist and he answered with warmth: "Yes, you're right, you would be the one to sit in a boat like that."

When they were about half-way through the wood she was incautious enough to ask: "How long are you staying here?"

She regretted the words at once and would have taken them back, but was quickly reassured when he smiled and avoided a direct answer. She was grateful for his tact; he had certainly noticed her confusion.

"I stay here, where you are," he replied.—"I shall stay as long as my money lasts," he then said. And he added: "But that won't be such a terrible long time."

She looked at him, smiled in her turn, and asked: "It won't be a long time? But you're rich, I've heard?"

Then the old mysterious look came over his face and he answered: "I rich? Look here, I believe there's a fable going about that I'm a man of money, that amongst other things I have a landed property of considerable value—it's not true; I beg of you not to believe it; it's humbug. I have no landed property; at least it's a very tiny one and I don't even own it all, I share it with my sister; besides, it's utterly and entirely eaten up by debts and all kinds of mortgages. That's the truth."

She laughed incredulously.

"Well, you generally tell the truth about yourself, don't you?" she said.

"You don't believe me? You have your doubts? Let me tell you all the same, though it's humiliating for me, but let me tell you the facts of the case. You must know that the very first day I was here I walked on foot thirty-five miles, I went on foot all the way to the next town and sent myself from there three telegrams about a large sum of money and an estate in Finland. Then I left these three telegrams open on the table in my room for all the people in the hotel to read. Do you believe me now? Isn't it all humbug about my money?"

"Assuming that you're not taking away your own character again."

"Again? You're mistaken, Fröken Kielland. By God in heaven, I'm not lying! There!"

Pause.

"But why did you do it? Why did you send these telegrams to yourself?"

"Well, you see, it would be rather a long story if I were to go into details.—Anyhow, to cut it short, I did it for swagger, to cut a dash in the town. There you have it!"

"Now you're lying!"

"Devil take me if I am!"

Pause.

"You're a strange person. What you expect to gain God only knows. One moment you go and—well, you don't even shrink from making me the warmest declaration; but when in a few words I talk you back to sense, you veer clean round and present yourself as the worst of charlatans, a liar and a cheat. You might spare yourself the trouble; one thing makes just as little impression on me as the other. I'm too much of an ordinary person; all this ingenuity is lost on me."

She had taken offence all at once.

"I didn't want to display any particular ingenuity just now. You see, all is lost in any case, so why should I exert myself?"

"Then why do you tell me all these unpleasant things about yourself whenever you get a chance?" she cried hotly.

And he replied slowly, with perfect self-command: "To influence you, Fröken."

Again they both stopped and stared at one another. He went on: "Once before I had the pleasure of telling you something of my method. You ask why I am always blabbing about those of my secrets which do me harm and which I might just as well keep to myself. My answer is, I do it from policy, from calculation. In other words, I imagine my candour makes some small impression on you in spite of your denial. In any case I may suppose that you feel a certain respect for the careless indifference with which I give myself away. Perhaps I am making a mistake; that's quite possible; if so, it can't be helped. But even if I am mistaken, you are lost to me anyhow and I have nothing more to lose by it. To such lengths can a man go—a last desperate throw. I provide you with accusations against myself and thereby do my little best to confirm you in your determination to send me packing. Why do I do it? Because it revolts my poor soul to be my own advocate and gain anything by that sort of meanness; I couldn't bring my lips to do it. But, you may say, I'm seeking to achieve in a cunning and roundabout way what others would achieve by cheap directness? Ah—no, I won't defend myself after all. Call it humbug, why not? that's the right word; I will go so far as to call it the shabbiest falsification. Good; let it be humbug and I don't deny it; you're right, my whole being is humbug. But, you see, all men are the prisoners of humbug in a

greater or less degree; so may not one sort of humbug be just as good as another, if everything is humbug at bottom?—I feel I'm getting into form; I'm not disinclined to ride one of my hobbies a while—— No, I won't do that all the same; good Lord, how weary I am of it all! Let it rip, I say, let it rip, and there's an end.—Now who would have thought, for instance, that there was anything wrong with Dr. Stenersen's household? I don't say there *is* anything wrong, mind you; that's why I merely ask if it would occur to anybody to think there was anything wrong in that respectable family. There are only two of them, man and wife, no children, no serious worries, and yet perhaps there is a third, God alone knows, but perhaps when all's done there is one other person besides man and wife, a young man, a too intimate friend of the house, Deputy Reinert. What are we to say? There may be faults on both sides. It may even be that the Doctor is aware of the whole thing and yet can't do anything about it; at any rate he drank very hard last night and was so reckless of everything that he proposed exterminating the whole human species with prussic acid and letting all go hang. Poor man!—But I don't suppose he's the only one who's up to the knees in humbug, even if I exclude myself—Nagel—who am up to the middle in it. What if I mentioned Minutten? A kind soul, a just man, a martyr! He has everything good on his side; but I have my eye on him. I tell you, I have my eye on him! That seems to surprise you? Have I given you a shock? That wasn't my intention. And let me reassure you at once that Minutten can't be shaken; he is indeed an honest man. Then why is it I don't let him out of my sight; why do I watch him round a corner at two in the morning when he's coming home from an innocent walk—at two in the morning? Why do I spy on him from every side when he's carrying his sacks of coal and touching his hat to people in the street? For

no reason, I assure you, for no reason! He interests me, that's all; I like him and I'm glad at this moment to be able to set him up as an example of the true and just man amid all the humbug that surrounds him. That's why I mention him and I'm quite sure you understand me.— But to come back to myself—— Oh no, no, I won't come back to myself at all, anything rather than that!"

His last exclamation was so genuine in its melancholy that it made her feel pity for him. She knew at that moment that she had to deal with a distracted and tormented soul. As, however, he immediately took care to efface this impression in her by laughing coldly at nothing in particular and swearing once more that everything was sheer humbug, her kindly feelings left her just as suddenly. She said sharply: "You dropped some hints about Fru Stenersen which would have been in sufficiently bad taste if they had only been half as blunt. And then you crow over a poor cripple like Minutten. It was a mean thing to do, a vulgar thing to do!"

She walked on again and he went with her. He made no reply and kept his eyes on the ground. His shoulders twitched once or twice and she saw to her amazement a couple of great tears running down his face. He turned away and whistled to a little bird to hide them.

They walked for a few minutes without saying anything. She was touched and bitterly repented her harsh words. Perhaps after all he was right in what he said; what did she know? Mightn't this person have seen more in a few weeks than she had seen in as many years?

They still walked in silence. He was once more perfectly calm and played carelessly with his handkerchief. In a few minutes they would come in sight of the parsonage.

Then she said: "Is your hand badly hurt? Let me see."

Whether it was to please him, or whether she actually yielded to him for a moment—she said this with feeling, almost with emotion, and at the same time she stopped.

Then all his passion ran over. At that moment, when she stood so close to him, with her head bent over his hand so that he caught the perfume of her hair and neck, while not a word was spoken, his love leaped into madness, into frenzy. He pressed her to him, first with one arm and then, as she struggled, with both, clasped her long and warmly to his bosom and almost lifted her off her feet. He felt her back relax as she gave in. Her lovely weight rested in his embrace and her veiled eyes looked up at his. He spoke to her, told her how glorious she was and how to the end of his life she would be his love of loves. One man already had given his life for her and he would do the same, at her slightest nod, at a word. Oh, how he loved her! And he repeated time after time, as he pressed her to him more and more tenderly: "I love you, I love you!"

She no longer resisted; her head fell over on his left arm and he kissed her passionately in the intervals of his fond words. He distinctly felt her clinging to him, and her eyes closed more and more as he kissed her.

"Meet me to-morrow by the tree; you remember the tree, the aspen. Meet me; I love you, Dagny! Will you meet me, dear? Come when you please; come at seven."

She did not answer, but said simply: "Let me go now."

And slowly she freed herself from his arms.

For an instant she stood looking about her, while confusion spread over her face; at last her mouth twitched helplessly; she staggered to a stone by the road-side and sank down on it. She was crying.

He bent over her and spoke in a low voice. This went on for a minute or two. Suddenly she sprang up with

clenched fists, her face white with rage, pressed her hands against her bosom, and said furiously: "You're a wretch! God, what a wretch you are! But perhaps you don't think so yourself. Oh, how could you, how could you!"

Again she began to cry.

He tried once more to calm her, but in vain; for half on hour they stood by the road-side without leaving the spot.

"And you actually ask me to meet you again," she said; "but I won't meet you; I won't have you in my sight; you're a scoundrel!"

He implored her, threw himself on his knees, and kissed her dress; but she only repeated that he was a scoundrel and had behaved like a wretch. What had he done to her? Go, go! He was not to follow her any farther, not a step farther!

And she began to walk towards the house.

He tried to follow her in spite of all, but she waved him back with her hand, saying: "Keep away!"

He stood watching her till she had gone some twenty paces; then he too clenched his fists and ran after her, defied her orders and ran after her and forced her again to stop.

"I don't mean any harm to you," he said; "have a little pity on me! As I stand here, I'm ready to kill myself simply to relieve you of my presence; it will cost you but a word. And I would repeat this to you to-morrow if I met you. But you cannot in charity refuse me justice. You realize that I have succumbed to a power in you which is beyond my control; and I am not entirely to blame for finding you in my path. God grant that you may never suffer as I do now."

Then he turned and left her.

The big shoulders on his short body twitched again and

again as he went along the road. He saw nobody, recognized no face among those he met, and he did not come to himself until he had gone through the whole town and found himself at the steps of the hotel.

XV

FOR the next three days Nagel was absent from the town. He had gone on a steamer trip and left his room at the hotel locked up. Nobody knew where he was, but he had boarded a north-bound boat and perhaps he had gone away only for pleasure.

When he returned early one morning before the town was out of bed, he looked pale and in want of sleep. In spite of that he did not go up to the hotel, but walked up and down the quay a good while and then struck out on a brand-new road to seaward, where the mill chimney was just beginning to smoke.

He was not away for long and was obviously only strolling to get rid of a couple of hours. When the market traffic began, he was there; he stood at the corner by the post office watching all who came and went, and as soon as he saw Martha Gude's green skirt, he came forward and greeted her.

Beg pardon, perhaps she had forgotten him? His name was Nagel; it was he who had bid for the chair, the old chair. Perhaps she had already sold it?

No, she hadn't sold it.

Good. And so nobody else had been to her and sent up the price? No buyers?

Yes, there were. But——

"What? Really? There have been? What do you say, a lady? Ah, these plaguy womenfolk, they will poke their noses everywhere! So she had got wind of this treasure of a chair and had to secure it at once. Yes, that is a woman all over. But what did she bid? how

high did she go? I tell you, I won't let the chair go at any price, devil trounce me if I do!"

Martha was flustered at his extravagant language and hastily replied. "No, no, you shall have it, with pleasure."

"Then may I call on you this evening at eight and settle the matter?"

Yes, perhaps he might. But wouldn't it be bettter for her to send the chair to the hotel? Then it was settled.—

By no means, not at all, he wouldn't allow that on any account. An article like that must be treated gently by practised hands; he positively could not permit a stranger even to look at it. At eight o'clock he'd be there. "Look here, it just occurred to me: no dusting, no washing, for God's sake! Not a drop of water!—"

Nagel went straight into the hotel, where he lay on his bed fully dressed and slept soundly and calmly till towards evening.

As soon as he had had supper he went down to the quay, to Martha Gude's cottage. It was eight o'clock; he knocked and entered.

The room had just been washed; the floor was scrubbed and the windows cleaned; Martha herself had even put on a necklace of beads. He was evidently expected.

After greetings he took a seat and opened negotiations at once. She was no more ready to give in than before; on the contrary, she was more obstinate than ever and still insisted on giving him the chair for nothing. At last he got in a rage, threatened to throw *five* hundred crowns in her face and run off with the chair. Yes, she deserved it! He had never found anyone so unreasonable in all his days and he asked, banging the table, if she was clean daft.

"Do you know what?" he said, looking at her sharply. "Your stubbornness is really beginning to make me suspicious. Tell me candidly—the chair is honestly come by?

For I must tell you I have to deal with all sorts of people and one can never be too careful. If the chair came into your possession in any surreptitious or ambiguous way, I daren't have anything to do with it. I will ask you to forgive me, though, if I have misconstrued your objection."

And he implored her earnestly to tell him the truth.

Bewildered by his suspicions, half hurt and half scared, she justified herself at once: the chair had been brought home by her grandfather and had been in the possession of her family for a hundred years; he must not think she was concealing anything. Tears showed in her eyes.

Good; then he must really put an end to this nonsense; that was all about it! He took out his wallet.

She took a step forward as though to check him once more; but he calmly laid the two red notes on the table and closed his wallet with a smack.

"There you are!" he said.

"Anyhow don't give me more than fifty crowns!" she begged. And at that moment she was so compietely at her wit's end that she stroked his hair twice, trying to make him yield. She didn't know what she was doing, but she stroked his hair and asked him to let her off with fifty crowns. The silly woman was still moist about the eyes.

He raised his head and looked at her. This white-haired pauper, this old maid of forty, whose eyes still had a dark glow and who yet had something about her that reminded him of a nun, this strange, outlandish beauty influenced him and made him waver for a moment. He took her hand and patted it, saying: "Dear me, what a queer creature you are!" But the next instant he rose hastily and dropped her hand.

"Then I hope you have no objection to my taking the chair away at once," he said.

And he took hold of the chair.

She was obviously no longer afraid of him. On seeing his hands were soiled from touching the old piece of furniture she at once offered him her handkerchief to wipe them with.

The money still lay on the table.

"By the by," he said, "excuse my asking you; isn't it best to keep the story of this transaction as far as possible to yourself? There's no use in letting the whole town hear about it, eh?"

"No," she said reflectively.

"In your place I should put the money away at once. Or rather, I should hang something over the window first of all. Take that skirt."

"It'll make it so dark, won't it?" she said. But all the same she took the skirt and hung it up, and he helped her to do it.

"You know, we ought to have done this to start with," he said. "It wouldn't do for people to see me in here."

To this she made no reply. She took the notes from the table, gave him her hand, and moved her lips, but did not get a word out.

While still holding her hand in his he said all at once: "Look here, may I put a question to you? I dare say you have some trouble in making both ends meet; I mean, without some assistance, without some relief.—Perhaps you're in receipt of relief?"

"Yes."

"Ah well, forgive me for asking. It occurs to me that if they get wind of your having money, they may not only stop your relief but even confiscate your money; they may go so far as that. So it's all-important to keep our business secret from everybody, do you see? I'm only advising you as a practical man. You mustn't tell a living soul of this transaction.—While I think of it, I ought

to give you smaller notes, so that you won't have to get change."

He thought of everything, every contingency. He sat down again and counted out the small notes; he didn't trouble to count them accurately, but gave her all the small notes he had, took them as they came and rolled the lot together.

"There, hide them well," he said.

And she turned away, unhooked her bodice, and hid the money in her bosom.

But when she had done that he did not get up; he sat on and said in a careless tone: "What was I going to say?—Oh, do you know Minutten?"

And he noticed how her face flushed.

"I've met him now and again," Nagel went on; "I'm very fond of him; I'm sure he's as good as gold. Just now I've commissioned him to find me a violin, and he'll do that all right, don't you think? Well, perhaps you don't know him?"

"Yes, I do."

"Oh yes, I remember, he told me he'd bought some flowers from you for a funeral, for Karlsen's funeral. Tell me, perhaps you know him pretty well? At any rate I suppose he can be trusted to carry out that commission satisfactorily? When one has to do with so many people, one has to make inquiries now and then. I once lost a sum of money simply by trusting a man blindly without taking any references; that was in Hamburg."

And for some reason or other Nagel told the story of this man through whom he had lost money. Martha still stood facing him, leaning against the table; she was ill at ease and said at last, quite angrily: "No, no, don't talk about him!"

"Who am I not to talk about?"

"Johannes—Minutten."

"Is Minutten's name Johannes?"

"Yes, Johannes."

"Is he really called Johannes?"

"Yes."

Nagel was silent. This simple piece of information that Minutten's name was Johannes positively gave him a shock and changed the expression of his face for a moment. He sat for a while speechless, and then asked: "And why do *you* call him Johannes? Not Grögaard, not Minutten?"

She answered with some embarrassment, casting down her eyes: "We've known each other from childhood——".

Pause.

Then Nagel began again in a jocular tone and with complete unconcern: 'Do you know the impression I've got? That Minutten must be deeply in love with you. Yes, it's true, that's how it strikes me. And it doesn't surprise me very much, though I must admit it's pretty cool of Minutten. Don't you think so?—in the first place he's no longer a young man, and in the second, of course, he's rather deformed. But goodness me, women are often such strange creatures; if the fancy takes them, they're ready to throw themselves completely away of their own free will—joyfully, in fact; they delight in it. That's the way with women! In 1886 I witnessed a phenomenon of this sort when a young lady of my acquaintance went and married her father's errand-boy. I'll never forget it. He was apprenticed to the business, a child of sixteen or seventeen, without a hair on his cheeks; but good-looking, perfectly lovely in fact, I must admit that. Well, she flung herself upon this raw youth with the madness of love and went off abroad with him. After about six months she came back, and then her love was gone. Yes, isn't it sad? her love was vanished! Then she bored herself to death for a few months; she was a married woman and therefore out of

the running; what was she to do? One day she made up her mind, snapped her fingers at everybody, kicked over the traces, began to rampage among students and salesmen and ended as *La Glu*. It was a pitiful sight! But once again she surprised everyone: when she had enjoyed herself for a couple of years in this excellent fashion, she sat down one day to write novels; she turned authoress and they said she had lots of talent. She was incredibly quick to learn; these two years among students and salesmen had matured her to an extraordinary degree and taught her the trick of writing. From that day on she turned out the most remarkable things. Ah, she was a wonderful woman!—Well, that's what you women are like. Ah, you laugh, but you can't deny it, not point-blank. An errand-boy of seventeen can easily turn their heads. I'm sure Minutten needn't go through life alone either if he takes a little trouble, keeps well up to the collar. You see, there's something about him which strikes even a man; yes, it's struck me; his heart is so provokingly pure and there isn't a grain of deceit in him. You know that; you know him inside out and know it is so? But then what is one to say of his uncle, the coal merchant? A sly old fox, I imagine, an unsympathetic person. I have the impression that it's really Minutten who keeps that business together. But then I ask myself, why shouldn't he be able to keep a business of his own together? In short, Minutten is capable any day of supporting a family.— You shake your head?"

"No, I didn't shake my head."

"Oh, I see; you're getting impatient and tired of all this talk about a man who doesn't concern you, and you're quite right too.—Look here, while I think of it—now don't be angry, I'm really only trying to help you as well as I can—you ought to keep your door well shut at night. You look so scared. My dear woman, don't be afraid

and don't suspect me either. I simply and solely wanted to tell you that you ought not to trust anyone too much, especially now that you have some money to take care of. I haven't exactly heard that the town's unsafe, but one can never be too cautious. At two in the morning, you know, it's pretty dark about here, and it just happens that at two in the morning I've heard suspicious sounds outside even my own windows. Well, well, you won't be angry with me for giving you good advice?— Good-bye, then! I'm glad I succeeded in wresting the chair from you at last. Good-bye, my dear!"

So saying he pressed her hand. At the door he turned once more and said: "Listen, you'd better say I gave you a couple of crowns for the chair. But not more, not a penny more, or they'll take it from you, remember that. I can rely on you, can't I?"

"Yes," she replied.

He took the chair away with him, beaming all over his face, sniggering and laughing aloud as though he had brought off a clever trick. "God bless me, how happy she is at this moment!" he said gleefully. "She won't get a wink of sleep to-night with all those riches!—"

When he got home he found Minutten waiting for him.

Minutten came from rehearsal and had a bundle of posters under his arm. Yes, the tableaux looked like being a great success; they were to represent historical scenes and would be given in different-coloured lights; he himself had a super's part.

And when did the bazaar open?

It was to be opened on Thursday; that was the 9th of July, the Queen's birthday. But Minutten was to start posting bills that very evening in all sorts of places; they had leave to stick one up even on the churchyard gate.— But what he'd come for was to report about the violin.

He hadn't succeeded in getting one anywhere; the only serviceable violin in the place was not for sale; it belonged to the organist, who wanted it for the bazaar; he had a couple of items to play.

Oh, then there was nothing to be done about that.

Minutten was preparing to go; as he stood, cap in hand, Nagel said: "But aren't we going to have a little drink? I must tell you, I'm in rather good spirits this evening; I've had a stroke of luck. Do you know, I've acquired at last after great trouble a piece of furniture that no collector in the country can match, I'm sure; this chair. Look at it! Do you know a gem when you see one, an absolutely unique bit of Dutch work? I wouldn't sell it for a fortune, by heaven I wouldn't! And that's why I'd like so much to drink a glass with you, if you have no objection. May I ring? No? But you can post those bills to-morrow.— No, I simply can't forget my luck to-day! Perhaps you don't know that I'm a collector in a small way and that I'm staying here to sniff out curios. Perhaps I haven't told you about my cow-bells either? Why, my goodness, then you have no idea what sort of man I am. Of course I'm an agronomist, but I have other interests besides that. Yes, I've collected to date two hundred and sixty-seven cow-bells. It's ten years since I started getting them together, and now, thank God, I have a very choice collection. And this chair here, do you know how I snapped it up? Chance, pure luck! I walk along the street one day, I pass a little house down by the quay, and from old habit I take a squint through the window as I go by. That pulls me up at once; I catch sight of the chair and instantly see what it's worth. I knock at the door and go in; an elderly, white-haired lady receives me—now, what was it she called herself? Well, it doesn't matter; I don't suppose you know her anyhow; Fröken Gude, I believe it was, Martha Gude, or

something like that.— Well, she didn't want to part with the chair, but I wheedled her so well that I got a definite promise at last, and to-day I've been to fetch it. But the best of it is that I got it for nothing; she let me have it gratis. That is, of course, I flung a couple of crowns on the table to prevent her feeling a grudge about it; but the chair's worth hundreds. I must ask you to keep this to yourself; one doesn't want to get a bad name. Not that I have anything to reproach myself with. This lady didn't understand the business and I, as connoisseur and purchaser, was under no obligation to look after her interest. Don't you agree? it's no good being foolish, one must watch one's opportunity, the struggle for life, you know.— But can you refuse to drink a glass of wine now that I've told you the whole thing?"

Minutten stuck to it that he must go.

"That's a bore," Nagel continued. "I'd been looking forward to a chat with you. You're the only man in the place who rouses my interest whenever I see you, the only one I think it worth while to keep an eye on, so to speak. He he, keep an eye on, I said. And your name's Johannes into the bargain? My dear friend, I've known that a long time, though nobody told me until this evening.— Now, please don't let me give you another scare. It's such a horrid shame that people are always frightened of me. Oh, don't deny it, you really did give me a terrified glance, though I won't go so far as to say you started——"

Minutten had now got as far as the door. He evidently wanted to cut the matter short and leave the hotel at once; and in fact the conversation was getting more and more uncomfortable.

"Is it the 6th of July to-day?" Nagel suddenly asked.

"Yes," replied Minutten; "it's the 6th of July." He now had his hand on the door-handle.

Nagel went slowly up to him, as close as he could go, and stared him in the face, with his hands behind his back. Standing in this attitude, he said in a whisper: "And where were you on the 6th of June?"

Minutten didn't answer, didn't say a word. Terror-stricken at the staring eyes and the mysterious whisper, unable to understand this desperate little question about a date a month old, he hastily pulled the door open and tumbled out on to the landing, where he spun round trying to find the stairs, while Nagel stood in the doorway shouting to him: "No, no, it's a mistake; please forget it! I'll explain another time, another time——"

But Minutten heard nothing. He was already in the hall before Nagel had finished speaking and from there he dashed into the street, without looking to right or left, across the square, over to the big pump, where he turned into the first side street that came and disappeared.

An hour later—it was ten o'clock—Nagel lit a cigar and went out. The town had not yet gone to bed; along the road to the parsonage a number of people were strolling backwards and forwards, and the cries and laughter of children at play still echoed in the streets. Women and men sat on their steps talking quietly in the mild evening air; now and then they called across the street to neighbours, who gave a friendly answer.

Nagel walked down towards the quays. He saw Minutten stick up posters on the bank, the post office, the school, and the jail. How carefully and conscientiously he went about it! What a good will he put into his work, never thinking of the time, though he needed rest! Nagel passed close to him and gave him a greeting, but did not stop.

When he had almost reached the quays, he heard a voice behind him; Martha Gude stopped him and said, quite out of breath: "Excuse me! You've given me too much money."

"Good-evening," he replied. "Are you out for a walk too?"

"No, I've been up the town, outside the hotel; I was waiting for you. You've given me too much money."

"Must we begin that farce over again?"

"But you've made a mistake!" she cried in dismay. "There was more than two hundred in small notes."

"Oh, that's it! I see, there were really a few crowns over the two hundred. Very well, then you can give me them back."

She began to unfasten her bodice, but stopped short and looked around her, not knowing what to do. Then she asked him to excuse her again; there were so many people about, perhaps she couldn't get the money out in the middle of the street, it was so well hidden——

"No," he hastened to reply; "I can fetch it, that's all right."

And they went home together. They met several people, who looked at them with inquisitive eyes.

On entering her room Nagel sat down by the window where he had sat before and where the skirt was still hanging as a curtain. While Martha was busy getting out the money, he said nothing; not till she had handed him the bunch of small notes, worn and faded ten-crown notes, which were still warm from her bosom and which her honesty would not let her keep even overnight, did he speak to her, asking her to keep the money.

But now, as once before, she seemed to suspect his intentions; she looked at him doubtfully and said: "No —I don't understand you——"

He got up abruptly.

"But I understand you perfectly well," he replied; "and so I get up and go to the door. Does that reassure you?"

"Yes—— No, you mustn't stand by the door." And she actually put out both her arms to bring him back.

This singular old maid was far too anxious to avoid giving offence.

"I have a favour to ask you," said Nagel, without resuming his seat; "you can do me a great pleasure if you will—yes, and I'd find some way of remembering it. I want to ask you to come to the bazaar on Thursday evening. Will you do me that pleasure? It would amuse you; there will be lots of people, lights, music, tableaux. Oh, do, you won't regret it! You're laughing; why do you laugh? Bless me, what white teeth you have, woman!"

"I can't go anywhere," she replied. "How could you think I could go there? And why should I? what makes you want me to?"

He explained the whole thing frankly and honestly: it was a fancy of his, he had been thinking of it a long time; the idea occurred to him a couple of weeks ago, but he'd forgotten it again till now. She was only to put in an appearance, to be one of the crowd; he wanted to see her there—— If she wished it, he wouldn't even speak to her, so that she would not be bothered with him at all. that wasn't the intention. It would simply give him pleasure to find her for once among the others, to hear her laugh, to see her looking young. Please now, she simply mustn't refuse!

He looked at her. How gloriously white her hair was, and how dark her eyes! One hand was fidgeting with the buttons of her dress, and this hand, a weak hand with long fingers, was grey in colour, perhaps not altogether clean, but it made a curiously chaste impression. Along the wrist ran two blue veins.

Yes, she said, it might be amusing. But, to begin with, she had no clothes; she hadn't even a dress for such an occasion——

He interrupted her: there were still three working days

to turn round in; she could get anything she wanted by Thursday. Oh yes, there was time enough! Was it settled then?

And by degrees she gave in.

Yes, she mustn't bury herself completely, he said; there was nothing to be gained by that. And besides, with her eyes, her teeth—no, it would be a pity! And those small notes on the table were to go to her dress; oh yes, no nonsense! All the more because it was his idea and it had cost her some effort to humour him.

He said good-night as usual, curtly, without giving her the slightest ground for uneasiness. But as she saw him out, it was she herself who once more gave him her hand and thanked him for inviting her to this bazaar. Such a thing hadn't happened to her for many, many years; she was quite out of the way of it. He would see, she'd behave nicely——

The great child, she even promised to behave nicely, though he had never asked her.

XVI

THE Thursday came; it rained a little, but in spite of that the bazaar was opened in the evening with a band and a great crowd of people. The whole town had turned up and people even came in from the country round to share in the unaccustomed entertainment.

When Johan Nagel entered the hall at nine o'clock, there was a full house. He found a place right down by the door, where he stood for some minutes listening to a speech. He was pale and wore his usual buff suit, but he had taken the bandage off his hand; the two wounds were almost healed.

He saw Dr. Stenersen and his wife on the platform; a little to the right of them stood Minutten with the others who were taking part in the tableaux, but Dagny was not there. The heat of the lamps and of all these tightly packed people soon drove him out of the hall; in the doorway he passed Deputy Reinert, to whom he bowed, but scarcely got a nod in return. He stayed in the entrance.

Then he discovered a thing which occupied his thoughts for a long time and roused his curiosity. On his left a door stood open leading to a side room where the public had left their cloaks, and in the light of the lamp he clearly saw Dagny Kielland in there, fingering his coat, which he had hung on a peg. He could not be mistaken; there was no one in the town who had a buff spring overcoat like his; it was undoubtedly his; he remembered exactly how he had hung it. She had nothing to do in there, but seemed to be looking for something and took the op-

portunity of feeling his coat all over time after time. He turned away instantly to avoid surprising her.

This little incident upset him. What was she looking for, and what had she to do with his coat? He could not get over it. Goodness knows, perhaps she wanted to see if he had fire-arms in his pocket; she might have thought him mad enough for anything. But what if she had slipped in a letter for him? He actually went so far as to imagine this happy impossibility. No, no, she had only been searching for her cloak; it could only have been an accident, the whole thing; how could he entertain such hopeless fancies! A little later, however, on seeing Dagny making her way through the hall, he slipped out and searched his coat pockets with beating heart. There was no letter, nothing at all, only his own gloves and handkerchief.

A round of applause broke out in the hall; the Mayor's inaugural speech was finished. And now the audience streamed out into the corridors, into the side rooms, wherever it was cool, took possession of all the chairs, and ordered refreshments. Several of the local young ladies darted about with trays and glasses, dressed as waitresses, with white aprons, and napkins on their arms.

Nagel was looking for Dagny; she was nowhere to be seen. He spoke to Fröken Andresen, who was one of the white-aproned, asked for wine, and she brought him champagne.

He looked at her in surprise.

"You never drink anything else, you know," she said with a smile.

However, this rather spiteful attention made him livelier than he had been. He asked her to drink a glass with him and she actually sat down, though she had plenty to do. He thanked her for her kindness, complimented her

on her dress, and went into raptures over an old filigree brooch she wore at her throat. She looked well; her long, aristocratic face with its prominent nose was extraordinarily refined, almost morbidly so, and it never changed; it had no nervous mobility. She spoke calmly and collectedly; one had a sense of ease in her company; she was a lady, a woman.

When she got up he said: "I believe there's a person here this evening to whom I should be glad to show some little attention; it's Fröken Gude, Martha Gude; I don't know whether you know her? I heard she'd come here. I can't tell you how much I should like to please her a little in some way or other; she is so lonely. Minutten has told me about her. Don't you think I could ask her to join us here? Provided, of course, you have no objection to having her here?"

"No, far, far from it," replied Fröken Andresen; "I'll get hold of her with pleasure, now at once. I know where she's sitting."

"But will you come back too?"

"Yes, thanks."

While Nagel sat waiting, Reinert, Holtan, and Dagny came in. Nagel rose and bowed. Dagny was as pale as he, in spite of the heat; she had on a yellow dress with short sleeves and an exaggerated gold chain. That gold chain was extremely unbecoming. She stopped at the door a moment with one hand behind her back, playing with her plait of hair.

Nagel went up to her. In a few passionate words he begged her to forgive his grave misbehaviour of the previous Friday; it should be the last time, the very last; she should never have cause to forgive him anything again. He spoke in a low voice, said what he had to say, and stopped.

She listened to him, looked at him even, and when he had done, she said: "I scarcely know what you're talking about; I've forgotten it; I *will* forget it."

With that she left him. She had looked at him with great unconcern.

There was a buzz of people everywhere, clinking of cups and glasses, popping of corks, laughter, shouts, and from the hall came the strains of the town brass band, which played so excessively badly—

When Fröken Andresen and Martha came in, they were accompanied by Minutten; they all sat down at Nagel's table and stayed there a quarter of an hour. Now and then Fröken Andresen carried a tray round to people who called for coffee; at last she left altogether; she had too much to do.

Then came the various items of the program: a quartet sang, Student Oien declaimed in a powerful voice a poem by himself, two ladies played the piano, and the organist gave his first violin solo. Dagny still sat there with the two men. At last Minutten was sent for; he had to run messages; more glasses were wanted, more cups, more sandwiches; everything had been underestimated for this crowd, this small-town crowd.

When Nagel was left alone with Martha, she too got up to go. She could not stay there alone; she had already seen Herr Reinert making remarks, at which Fröken Kielland had laughed. No, she had better go.

But Nagel persuaded her to drink one little glass more at all events. Martha was dressed in black; her new dress fitted nicely, but did not suit her; it gave this singular-looking damsel an older appearance and contrasted too strongly with her white hair. Only her eyes were full of fire, and when she laughed, her sensitive face became quite vivacious.

He said: "And you're amusing yourself? You're enjoying the evening?"

"Yes, thanks," she replied, "I'm enjoying it."

He talked to her without a break, suiting his conversation to her, and took it into his head to tell her a yarn, which made her laugh heartily; it was the story of how he had acquired one of his most valuable cow-bells. A treasure, an inestimable antique! There was the name of a cow engraved on it, and this cow's name was nothing less than Oystein, so it must certainly have been a bull——

This made her burst out laughing. She forgot herself, forgot where she was, shook her head, and laughed like a child at this feeble witticism. She was positively radiant.

"I say," he said; "I believe Minutten was jealous."

"No," she replied with hesitation.

"I had that impression. Be that as it may, I would rather sit here alone with you. It's such fun to hear you laugh."

She made no answer and looked at the floor.

And they went on talking. He sat so as to have a constant view of Dagny's table.

Some minutes went by. Fröken Andresen came back for a moment, said a word or two, took a sip at her glass, and went away again.

Then Dagny suddenly left her place and came up to Nagel's table.

"What fun you're having here!" she said, and her voice shook a little. "Good-evening, Martha. What are you two laughing at so much?"

"We're amusing ourselves as well as we can," Nagel replied. "I chatter away and Fröken Gude is very indulgent; she has laughed several times.— Mayn't we offer you a glass?"

Dagny sat down.

An unusually loud storm of applause from the hall gave Martha an excuse to get up and see what was on. She moved farther and farther away; at last she called to them: "It's a conjurer; I must see this!" and disappeared.

Pause.

"You've deserted your party," said Nagel; and he would have said more, but Dagny cut him short: "And yours has deserted you."

"Oh, she'll come back all right. Doesn't Fröken Gude look strange? She's as happy as a child to-night."

Dagny made no answer; she asked: "Have you been away for a little?"

"Yes."

Pause.

"Do you really find it amusing this evening?"

"I? I don't even know what's going on," he answered. "I didn't come here to amuse myself exactly."

"What did you come for then?"

"To see you again, of course. Oh, only at a distance, I mean, in silence——"

"I see. And that's why you brought a lady with you?"

He didn't understand this; he looked at her and reflected.

"Is it Fröken Gude you mean? I don't know what to answer. I've heard so much about her; she sits at home by herself year after year; there isn't a single pleasure in her life. It wasn't I that brought her in; I only wanted to entertain her a little while she was here, to prevent her being bored, that's all. Fröken Andresen brought her to this table. Lord, how that woman has suffered! It's turned her hair white——"

"Well, you surely don't think—you don't imagine I'm jealous, do you? You're mistaken! Oh, I remember

your story about a madman who went for a drive with twenty-four carriages; the man s-stammered, you said, and he fell in love with a girl called Klara. Oh yes, I remember it well enough. And Klara wouldn't have anything to say to this man, and wouldn't let her hunch-back sister have him either. I don't know why you told me this; you know best yourself; it's no affair of mine. But you won't succeed in making me jealous, if that's what you were trying to do this evening. Neither you nor your s-stammerer!"

"But, good heavens!" he said, "you can't mean what you say."

"Yes, I mean it," she answered.

Pause.

"You think I should behave like that if I wanted to make you jealous? Bring in a lady of forty, let her take herself off, drop her as soon as you appear—why, you must take me for a fool."

"I don't know what you are; I only know that you've wormed your way in on me and caused me the most painful hours in my life and that I don't understand myself any longer. I don't know whether you're a fool; I don't know whether you're mad either; but I'm not going to take the trouble to find out; it doesn't matter to me what you are."

"Well, I suppose that's so," he said.

"And why shouldn't it be so?" she went on, irritated at his compliance. "What in the world have I to do with you? Your conduct to me has been disgraceful, and after that you can hardly expect me to go on worrying about you. Yet you tell me a story full of insinuations; I'm sure you had some reason for telling me that about Klara and her sister; oh yes, you had! But why do you persecute me? I don't mean at this minute—it was I who came to you—but at other times; why can't you leave me in

peace? And no doubt from my sitting here a moment and saying a few words to you you'll try to make out that I'm anxious, that I'm concerned——"

"My dear young lady, I have no illusions."

"You haven't? But I can never tell if you're speaking the truth; no, I can't. I have my doubts of you; I disbelieve you and suspect you of anything almost. It's quite possible I'm doing you an injustice now, and for once in a way I may be allowed to return spite for spite. I'm so tired of all your insinuations and scheming——"

He remained silent, slowly turning his glass round on the table. But when she repeated that she didn't believe him, he replied simply:

"No, I have deserved that."

"Yes," she went on, "you may be sure I believe very little about you. I even suspected your shoulders, your big shoulders, to be cotton-wool. I frankly confess I went into the cloak-room a little while ago to examine your coat and see if you had padded shoulders. And though I was mistaken and there was nothing wrong with the shoulders, I'm still suspicious; I can't help it. For instance, I'm sure you'd use any contrivance to add a couple of inches to your height, as you're not particularly tall. I'm certain you'd do that if there was such a contrivance. My goodness, wouldn't anyone distrust you? Who are you anyway? And why did you come here? You don't even go under your own name; for your right name's Simonsen, plain Simonsen! I heard that from the hotel. They tell me you've had a visit from a lady who knew you and called out Simonsen before you could stop her. Goodness, how ridiculous it is, and how shabby too! And they say in the town that you amuse yourself by giving little boys cigars to smoke and that you raise all sorts of scandals in the street. I'm told, for instance, that you asked a servant-girl something when you met her in the

market, asked her in the hearing of a lot of people. But in spite of all that you seem to think it quite in order to make me declarations and present yourself to me time after time and—— That's what hurts me so inexpressibly, that you should dare——"

She stopped. The twitching of her mouth betrayed her emotion; every word came from the heart; she meant what she said and did not mince matters. There was a little pause before he replied: "Yes, you're right; I have caused you a deal of pain— It is evident that if you watch a man carefully day by day for a month, take note of everything he says and does, you will find something queer to hitch on to. And you may be doing him some slight injustice; but that makes no great difference, I admit. This town is not very large; I am rather conspicuous; people trip over me; they are all eyes when I am about; there's no avoiding it. And then I'm not all I ought to be."

"Why, bless me!" she said sharply, "naturally it's because the town's so small that people notice you; that goes without saying. In a larger town you wouldn't be the only man to attract people's attention."

This cold and extremely true answer at first called forth his admiration. He was on the point of acknowledging it by some compliment, but thought better of it. She was too excited, too angry with him, besides which perhaps she failed to appreciate his full importance. This hurt him a trifle. What was he, then, in her eyes? A perfectly ordinary stranger in a little town, a man who attracted notice simply because he was a stranger in that little town and wore a loud suit.

He said rather bitterly: "But haven't they told you that I once went and wrote an indecent verse on a tombstone, on Mina Meek's tombstone? Didn't anybody see it? It's true, though; yes, it is. It is also true that I've

been to the drug store in this town, this very town we're in, and asked for medicines for a disgusting complaint that I'd written down on a piece of paper; but I couldn't get the medicines because I had no prescription. And while I think of it, hasn't Minutten told you that I once tried to bribe him with two hundred crowns to acknowledge a child of mine? That too is the unvarnished truth; Minutten can witness it himself. Oh, I'm sure I could find plenty of other instances——"

"No, you needn't; I've heard quite enough before now," she answered defiantly. And, with eyes growing cold and hard, she reminded him of the bogus telegrams, of the wealth he had invented for himself, of the violin case he dragged about though he had no violin and couldn't play either, of one thing after another, all his impostures, even of the medal which from his own confession he hadn't come by in a very honourable fashion. She remembered them all and did not spare him; at that moment every trifle seemed important to her and she gave him to understand that, while at first she had thought he was only inventing all these shabby tricks, she now firmly believed he was guilty of them. Yes, she was convinced he was an impudent and equivocal character! "And being what you are," she said, "you still try to catch me off my guard and alarm me, to make me commit follies with you. You're not ashamed; you have no heart for anyone but yourself; you do nothing but declare your——"

At that moment she was interrupted by Dr. Stenersen, who came in from the hall waving his hands and very busy. He was one of the promoters of the bazaar and worked for all he was worth.

"Good-evening, Herr Nagel!" he cried. "That was a wild time we had the other night— Oh, I say Fröken Kielland, you must look out, we're getting ready for the tableaux presently."

And the Doctor vanished again.

Another musical item was given and the hall was in an uproar. Dagny leaned forward and looked through the door; then she turned again to Nagel and said. "Now Martha's coming back."

Pause.

"Can't you hear what I say?"

"Yes," he replied absently. He did not look up, but continued to turn his full glass round and round without drinking and bowed his head nearly to the table.

"Hush!" she said sneeringly; "now they're playing again. You know, to listen to that sort of music one ought to be at a little distance, in the next room, with the loved one's hand in one's own—wasn't that what you said once? I believe it's the very same waltz of Lanner; and now, when Martha comes——"

But all at once she seemed to regret her spitefulness; she stopped short, a gleam appeared in her eyes, and she shifted nervously on her chair. He still sat there hanging his head; she could see how short and irregular was his breathing. She rose and took up her glass, meaning to say something, a word or two in a kinder tone to conclude with: "Well, I must go now," she began.

He looked up at her quickly, rose, and took his glass. They both drank in silence. He made an effort to keep his hand steady; she could see that he forced himself to appear calm. And this man whom she thought annihilated, crushed by her scorn, suddenly said in a tone of perfect politeness and unconcern: "By the way, Fröken, will you be so kind—I don't suppose I shall see you again—will you be so kind when you happen to be writing to your *fiancé* to remind him about two shirts he promised Minutten once, a couple of years ago. I beg you to forgive my interfering in a matter which does not concern me; I only do so on Minutten's account. I hope you will

excuse my presumption. Say that it was two flannel shirts, then he'll remember."

For a moment she was perfectly stunned; she looked at him open-mouthed, couldn't find a word to say, and even forgot to put down her glass. This lasted a whole minute. But she recovered herself, threw him a furious glance, full of all the agitation within her, a glance that was meant to crush him, and turned her back at once. As she passed out, she banged her glass down on a table by the door, and disappeared into the hall.

She seemed to have forgotten all about Reinert and Holtan, who were still sitting in the same place, waiting for her.

Nagel sat down again. His shoulders began to twitch once more, and several times his hand went up to his head. He seemed in a state of collapse. When Martha came, he jumped up, a grateful look came into his eyes, and he put out a chair for her.

"How good you are, how good you are!" he said. "Sit down here; I'll be so attentive, I'll tell you a whole heap of stories if you like. You shall see how amusing I'll be if you'll just sit down. Do, please! Oh, you shall go when you please and I may see you home, mayn't I? I'll never do you any harm, never! Look here, you'll have a tiny glass now, won't you? I'm going to tell you something funny that'll make you laugh again. I'm so glad you came back. Lord, what a blessing it is to hear you laugh, you who are always so serious! It wasn't very amusing in the hall, was it? We'll sit here instead; it's too hot in there; do sit down!"

And Martha hesitated, but sat down.

Then Nagel talked incessantly, told funny stories and anecdotes one after another, gabbled away about anything and everything, feverishly, forcedly, terrified that

she might go if he stopped. He changed colour with the effort, got confused, and tapped his head helplessly to pick up the thread again, and Martha thought that was part of the fun and laughed innocently. She was not bored; her old heart swelled and she was carried away so far as to join in the talk. How strangely warm and naïve she was! To his remark that life was quite incomprehensible in its misery, wasn't it? she replied: "Good luck to it!"—this woman who had lived in poverty year after year by selling eggs in the market, she said that life—no, it was not too bad, many a time it was good!

Many a time life was good, she said!

"Yes, I believe you're right," he answered— "Well, now we must look at the tableaux. Let's stand here in the doorway; we can sit down again when you like. Can you see from there? If not, I must lift you up."

She laughed and shook her head reprovingly.

As soon as he caught sight of Dagny on the stage, his gaiety faded away; his eyes grew stiff and he saw none but her. He followed the direction of her eyes, measured her from top to toe, watched her expression, noticed that a rose on her bosom swayed up and down, up and down. She stood on the far side of the group of people and was easily recognizable in spite of her elaborate make-up. Fröken Andresen sat in the middle as queen. The scene was shown in a red light, a rebus-like arrangement of figures and armour which Dr. Stenersen had worked out with great care and trouble.

"It's pretty!" Martha whispered.

"Yes— What's pretty?" said he.

"That; can't you see? What are you looking at?"

"Oh yes, it's pretty."

And, lest she should suspect that he had eyes only for a single figure of the group, he began asking her who each

of the performers was, though he scarcely listened to her answers. They stood there till the red light was on the point of going out and the curtain came down.

The five tableaux followed each other with a few minutes' interval; twelve o'clock came: Martha and Nagel were still standing in the doorway looking at the final tableau. When at last it was over and the music began again, they went back to their table and talked. She became more and more tractable and no longer spoke of leaving.

A couple of young ladies came round with note-books in their hands selling raffle tickets for dolls, rocking-chairs, embroideries, a tea set, a clock. There was a great noise everywhere; people let themselves go and shouted; the hall and the adjoining rooms resounded with a roar of voices like an exchange. Closing time was not till two.

Fröken Andresen took a seat again at Nagel's table. Oh, she was so tired, so tired! Yes, thanks, she would like a glass, half a glass! And mightn't she fetch Dagny?

And she fetched Dagny, who was accompanied by Minutten.

Then the following incident took place: a table was upset near them, cups and glasses fell on the floor, and Dagny gave a little cry and clutched Martha's arm nervously. A moment later she laughed at herself and asked the company to excuse her; but her face was flushed with emotion. She was in great excitement and laughed spasmodically; her eyes were shining brightly. She was ready to go home and was only waiting for the schoolmaster, who was to be her escort as usual.

But Holtan, who was still sitting with Reinert and had not left his chair for over an hour, was getting fairly intoxicated.

"Herr Nagel will see you home, I'm sure, Dagny," said Fröken Andresen.

Dagny burst out laughing. Fröken Andresen looked at her in astonishment.

"No," replied Dagny; "I daren't walk with Herr Nagel any more. You never know what he'll do next. He once went so far—between ourselves—as to ask me for an assignation. It's a fact! Under a tree, he said, a big aspen tree, in such and such a spot. No, Herr Nagel is too unaccountable for me! Just now he solemnly demanded of me a couple of shirts which he said my *fiancé* had promised Grögaard once upon a time. And Grögaard himself knows nothing at all about it! Isn't that so, Grögaard? It's most extraordinary!"

So saying, she got up quickly, still laughing, and went over to the schoolmaster, to whom she said a word or two. Evidently she was trying to get him away.

Minutten was very uneasy; he tried to say something, but got mixed and gave it up. He looked from one to the other with anxious eyes. Even Martha was surprised and alarmed; Nagel spoke to her, whispered a reassurance, and began to fill up the glasses. Fröken Andresen promptly hit upon the topic of the bazaar: what a crowd of people in spite of the bad weather! Oh, they must be making a lot of money; the expenses were nothing very terrible——

"Who was that handsome lady who played the harp?" asked Nagel; "the one with the Byronic mouth and the silver arrow in her hair?"

She was a stranger, a visitor to the town. Was she so handsome?

Yes, he thought her handsome. And he put several questions about this lady, though everyone could see that his thoughts were elsewhere. What had he in his head? Why had that angry frown appeared on his forehead? He slowly twisted his glass.

Then Dagny returned to the table. Standing behind

Fröken Andresen's chair and buttoning her gloves, she spoke again in her clear and lovely voice: "But what were you thinking of exactly when you asked me for that assignation, Herr Nagel? What had you in your head? Tell me that."

"Oh, but Dagny!" whispered Fröken Andresen, rising to her feet. Minutten also rose. They all felt extremely awkward. Nagel looked up; his face did not betray much emotion, but they all noticed that he let go his glass and clasped his hands convulsively and that he was breathing rapidly. What was he going to do? What was the meaning of his slight smile, which vanished again at once?

To everyone's surprise he answered in a calm voice: "Why did I ask you for that assignation? Fröken Kielland, wouldn't you rather I spared you the explanation? I have caused you so much unpleasantness already. I regret it, and on my conscience I would do anything to have it undone. But as to my reason for asking you to meet me, you know that well enough; I have made no attempt to conceal it, though I ought to have done so. You must be merciful. I can say no more——"

He stopped, nor did she say anything more; she had evidently expected a different answer. At last Holtan came up, in time to put an end to the painful scene; he was very flushed and not quite steady on his legs.

Dagny took his arm and went out.

From now on the remainder of the little party breathed more freely; they all became livelier; Martha laughed gleefully at nothing and clapped her hands. Sometimes, fearing she was overdoing it, she checked herself with a blush and looked round at the others to see if they had noticed anything. This charming confusion, which was repeated time after time, delighted Nagel and prompted him to play the buffoon simply to keep her at it. One

of his tricks was doing Old Man Noah with a cork between his teeth.

Fru Stenersen had joined them. She declared she wouldn't move from the spot till it was all over; there was still one turn to come, a couple of acrobats that she simply must see. No, she always held out to the last; the night was so long, it was too dull to go home all by herself. Shouldn't they all go in and see the acrobats?

And they all went into the hall.

While they were sitting there, a tall man with a beard came down the central gangway, carrying a violin case. It was the organist; he had done his part of the program and was ready to go home. He stopped, bowed, and began at once to talk to Nagel about the violin. It was quite true, Minutten had been to see him and offered to buy it; but, you see, that was impossible; it was an heirloom; he regarded it precisely as a little human being, such was his affection for it. In fact he had even given it a name. You could see yourself it was no ordinary violin— And he opened the case with care.

There lay the dainty, dark-brown instrument, carefully wrapped in pink silk, with cotton-wool to protect the strings.

It was a fine one, wasn't it? And those three initials in tiny Cape rubies at the top of the finger-board, they stood for Gustav Adolf Christensen. No, it would be a shame to sell a thing like that; what would one have to comfort one when the days grew long? It was quite another matter if he only wanted to try it a moment, play a few notes——

No, Nagel didn't want to try it.

But meanwhile the organist had taken the instrument right out of its case, and as the two acrobats threw their final somersaults and the audience applauded, he con-

tinued to talk about this remarkable violin, which had been handed down through three generations. It was light as a feather; feel it yourself; you may take hold of it—

And Nagel agreed it was light as a feather. But when he had once got hold of the violin, he began to turn it about and finger the strings. He put on the air of a connoisseur and said: "It's a Mittelwalder, I see." But it wasn't difficult to see that, since the name was printed on a label in the belly of the instrument; why then this connoisseur's air? When the acrobats were off and the applause had died down, he stood up; he said nothing, not a word, but stretched out his hand for the bow. The next moment, while the audience was leaving its seats and making for the entrance, while all was noise and loud talk, he suddenly began to play and soon imposed silence everywhere. This little broad-shouldered person bobbing up in his loud yellow clothes in the middle of the hall struck everybody with astonishment. And what did he play? A song, a barcarole, a dance, a Hungarian dance of Brahms, a passionate *pot-pourri,* a raw, surging strain that penetrated everywhere. He put his head on one side; the whole thing had a mystic look, his sudden appearance outside the program, his striking exterior, his wild dexterity, which bewildered his hearers and made them think of a magician. He kept on for several minutes and the audience sat motionless; he changed into a mournful strain of immense pathos, a *fortissimo* of trumpet-like power; he stood perfectly still; nothing moved but his arm, and he kept his head on one side. He had turned up so unexpectedly, surprising even the bazaar committee, that he actually took these townspeople and rustics by storm; they couldn't grasp it; in their ears this music sounded much better than it was, for it seemed right enough, though he was playing with careless impetuosity. But after four or five minutes of it he suddenly swept his bow across in a

gruesome chord, a desperate howl, a lamentable wail, so impossibly harrowing that no one knew what was coming next; he gave three or four strokes like this and then broke off and took the violin from his chin.

It was a whole minute before people came to their senses; at last they began to applaud wildly and persistently; some cried: "Bravo!" got up on the seats and cried: "Bravo!" The organist received his violin back with a deep bow, felt it over, and laid it down gingerly; then he took Nagel's hand and thanked him time after time. All was hubbub and confusion; Dr. Stenersen appeared, puffing and blowing, seized Nagel by the arm, and exclaimed: "But damn it, man, you do play after all!"

Fröken Andresen, who sat next him, was still full of amazement and said: "Why, you told us you couldn't play!"

"Nor can I," he replied, "not much, nothing to speak of, and I'm not afraid to confess it. If you only knew what a sham it was, how little of it was genuine! But I made it seem all right, didn't I?—Oh, one must astonish the natives, stick at nothing!—Shall we go back to our glasses? Will you ask Fröken Gude to come too?"

And they went back to the side room. Everybody was still full of this mysterious person who had given them such a surprise; Deputy Reinert himself actually stopped a moment and said as he went by: "I want to thank you for being so good as to invite me to a bachelor party the other evening. I couldn't come, I was engaged; but I thank you very much, it was awfully kind of you."

"But why did you finish up with those horrible chords?" asked Fröken Andresen.

"Well, I don't know," replied Nagel, "but it came like that. I wanted to tread on the tail of a devil."

Dr. Stenersen came up again and paid him another compliment, and again Nagel replied that his playing was hum-

bug and sham, full of vulgar effects; if they only knew how little there was in it! His double-stoppings were false; oh yes, most of them were a trifle false, he could hear it himself, but he couldn't do any better, he'd been out of practice so long.

More and more people came round the table; they sat till the last minute; the crowd was streaming out and the lights were being extinguished before they got up. It was half past two.

Nagel leaned over to Martha and whispered: "I may see you home, mayn't I? I have something to say to you."

He hurriedly paid his bill, said good night to Fröken Andresen, and followed Martha out. She had no cloak, only an umbrella, which she tried to hide because it was so full of holes. As they passed out, Nagel noticed Minutten following them with a long rueful glance. His face was even wrier than usual.

They went straight home to Martha's cottage. Nagel peered about him and could see no one. He said: "If you would let me come in for a little while, I should be so grateful."

She hesitated.

"It's so late," she said.

"You know I've promised never to give you any cause for annoyance. I *must* speak to you."

She opened the door.

When they came in, she lit a candle, while he hung something over the window as before. He waited till she had finished and then said: "Have you enjoyed yourself this evening?"

"Yes, thank you," she replied.

"Well, that wasn't what I wanted to talk about either. Come and sit a little nearer. You mustn't be the least bit

afraid of me; will you promise me that? Good, give me your hand on it."

She gave him her hand and he kept it.

"And you don't think I'm a liar either, that I would tell you a lie, do you? I have it in my mind to say something to you; you don't think I would tell you a lie?"

"No."

"No, because I'll explain it all before I've done— But how far do you trust me? I mean, how far can you go in believing me? Nonsense! What rubbish I'm talking! But the fact is, it's rather difficult. You believe me if I say, for instance, that I'm so—really so fond of you? Well, you must have seen that yourself. But supposing I went further—I mean—— You understand, I want in so many words to ask you to be my wife. Yes, my wife; now I've said it. Not merely my mistress, but my wife— God bless me, how you take on about it! No, no, let me keep your hand; I shall be able to explain myself much better and you'll understand perfectly. Now imagine the possibility that your ears do not deceive you, that I have actually proposed to you without much beating about the bush, and that I really mean every word I say; imagine that possibility and then give me leave to continue. Good! How old are you? Well, I didn't mean to ask that; but I'm twenty-nine myself; I'm past the harum-scarum age; you are perhaps four or five years older, that makes no——"

"I'm twelve years older," she said.

"Twelve years older!" he exclaimed, delighted that she was paying attention, that she hadn't lost her head completely. "Twelve years older, that's excellent, that's positively grand! Well, and do you think twelve years are any obstacle? Why, you must be crazy! But be that as it may, if you were thrice twelve years older, what would it matter so long as I'm fond of you and honestly

mean every word I'm saying? I've thought it over a long time; well, not so very long, but for several days anyhow; I'm not lying; for heaven's sake believe me when I entreat you so earnestly. I've thought it over for quite a lot of days and it's kept me awake at night. You have such wonderful eyes; they have attracted me from the first time I saw them. For a pair of eyes can draw me to the world's end; ah, an old man once dragged me round a wood for half a night simply by his eyes. The man was possessed—— Well, that's another story! But your eyes have had a strange effect on me. Do you remember one day when you stood here in the middle of the room and looked at me as I passed outside? You didn't turn your head; you simply followed me with your eyes; I shall never forget it. But when I met you and was able to talk to you, it was your smile that moved me. I don't know that I have seen anyone laugh with such warm heartiness as you; but you don't know it yourself, and that's just the wonderful beauty of it, that you don't know it yourself.—— Now I'm talking the most fearful bosh; I can hear that. But I have a feeling that I must go on talking incessantly or else you won't believe me, and that gets me tangled up. But if only you wouldn't sit like that, on the spring—I mean, ready to jump up and go—I should make a better hand at it. Please let me hold your hand again and then I'll talk more clearly. There, thanks!—— You understand I'm really not asking any more of you than what I've said; I'm not concealing anything. And what is there in my words to stagger you so? You can't realize that I've thought of anything so mad, you can't grasp that I—that I want—and you think it can't be possible; isn't that it, isn't that what you're thinking?"

"Yes.—— Oh heavens, do leave off!"

"But look here now: I don't deserve that you should still suspect me of double-dealing.—"

"No," said Martha, suddenly repentant; "I don't suspect you of anything, but it's impossible all the same."

"Why is it so impossible? Are you bound to anyone else?"

"No, no."

"Not at all? For if you were bound to anyone—let us say, simply to give it a name—to Minutten——"

"No!" she cried loudly. And he positively felt a squeeze of her hand.

"No? Well then, there's nothing to prevent it so far. Let me proceed: you mustn't think I'm so much above you that it would be impossible on that ground. I won't keep anything from you; in many ways I'm not as I ought to be; well, you heard what Fröken said this evening. And I dare say you've heard from other people how badly I've behaved in one way or another. I think they sometimes do me an injustice, but in the main they're right; I'm a man of grave faults. So that you, with your pure nature and your shrewd, childlike mind, are infinitely above me, instead of the other way about. But I would promise always to be good to you; you may believe me, I shouldn't find it difficult; my greatest joy would be to make you happy.— There is another thing too. I dare say you're a little afraid of what the town might say? Now in the first place the town would have to put up with your marrying me, in its own church if you like. And in the second, the town has been given enough food for gossip as it is; it has scarcely gone unnoticed that I have met you once or twice before and that this evening I had your company at the bazaar. So, as far as that goes, it won't make things much worse than they are already. And, good Lord, what does it matter? You needn't worry

a scrap what the world thinks.— Are you crying? Why, are you sorry I've exposed you to gossip this evening?"

"No, it's not that."

"What is it then?"

She did not answer.

Something occurred to him: "Do you think I'm pressing you too hard?" he asked. "Tell me, you didn't drink any champagne to speak of? Not even two glasses, I should say? Perhaps you've got the idea that I want to take advantage of your having had a mouthful of wine to get you to give in more readily? Is that what you're crying for?"

"No, no, not at all."

"Then what are you crying for?"

"I don't know."

"But at any rate you didn't think I've come here with any treacherous thoughts! By God in heaven, I'm honest through and through, believe me!"

"Yes, I do believe you; but I don't understand it, it's given me such a turn. You can't mean—what you said."

Yes, he meant it! And he explained himself at length, while all the time he held her weak little hand in his and the rain beat against the window panes. He spoke very quietly, adapted himself to her ideas, and at times he babbled away in pure baby talk. Oh, they'd get on all right, she'd see! They'd go away, far, far away, goodness knows where, but they'd hide themselves so nobody should know what had become of them. That's what they'd do, eh? And then they'd buy a little cottage and a little patch of ground in the middle of a wood, a beautiful wood somewhere or other; it should be their very own, and they'd call it Eden, and he'd work at it, oh, how he'd work at it! But it might be he'd get rather low-spirited at times; oh yes, that was possible; something might occur to his mind, some memory, some incident that were best forgotten; how easily that

might happen! But then she'd have a little patience with him, wouldn't she? Yes, because he'd never let it worry her; no, he'd promise that. All he'd ask was to be left alone to get over it, or he'd go far away into the depths of the forest and come back in a little while. Oh, but no harsh word should ever be uttered in her cottage! And they'd deck it with the prettiest wild flowers they could find and moss and stones; the floor would be spread with juniper which he'd go out and gather. And at Christmas time they'd always remember to put out a sheaf for the little birds. Just think how they'd make the time pass and how happy they'd be! They would always be together; they'd run in and out and never be away from each other; in summer they'd take long walks and see how the trees and grass trembled and grew from year to year. And heavens, what a lot they'd do for any strangers and wayfarers that chanced to pass their home. They must have some cattle, a pair of big, glossy animals that they'd bring up to eat out of their hands, and while he was digging and hoeing and tilling the ground, she'd look after the beasts.—

"Yes," said Martha. Unconsciously she said yes and he heard it.

He went on: besides, they must take a holiday once or twice a week, when they could go hunting and fishing together, hand in hand, she in short skirts with a belt round her waist, he in a blouse and buckled shoes. How they could sing and talk aloud and shout so their voices rang through the wood! But hand in hand, that was it, wasn't it?

"Yes," she said again.

Little by little she was carried away; he made it all seem so clear to her, he thought of everything and had every little detail in his head. He even told her they would have to find a spot where there was water handy. Oh

but he'd see to that, he'd see to everything; she need only leave it to him. Oh, he had the strength to clear a place for their home in the depth of the forest; he had a pair of stout fists, look at them!— And with a smile he compared her slender, childish hand with his own.

She allowed him to do what he liked with her; even when he patted her on the cheek, she sat still and looked at him. Then he asked her straight out, with his lips close to her ear, if she could and if she would. And sure enough she answered: "Yes," a dreamy, absent "Yes" that was no more than a whisper. But in a little while she began to waver: No, when she thought it over, it couldn't be possible after all. How could he mean it? What was she?

And again he convinced her that he meant it, meant it with all the will that was in him. She should never lack anything, even if things went against them for a time; she needn't be afraid of that. He talked for a whole hour and shook her resistance bit by bit. Twice again in the course of this hour she refused him, hid her face in her hands, and cried: "No, no!" but yielded all the same; she studied his face and convinced herself that it was no momentary triumph he sought. Well, so be it, in God's name, if he wanted her! She was vanquished; it was no use resisting any more. In the end she gave him a downright "Yes."

The candle was burning low in the empty bottle; they still sat holding each other's hands and talking. She was quite overcome by emotion; tears were constantly in her eyes, but she smiled through them.

He said: "To come back to Minutten, I'm certain he was jealous at the bazaar."

"Well," she replied, "perhaps he was. But it can't be helped."

"No, that's right; it can't be helped!— Look here, I

want so much to do something for you this evening, what shall it be? Oh, I want to make you clasp your hands with delight! Tell me what it is to be; ask me for something! Ah, you're too good, darling; you never ask for anything! Well, well, Martha, remember what I say: I shall protect you, I shall try to guess your wishes, and I'll take care of you to my last hour. Remember that, dear, will you? You shall never be able to say that I've forgotten my promise."

It was four o'clock.

They got up; she took a step towards him and he clasped her to his breast. She put her arms around his neck and they stood thus for a few moments; her pure and timid nun's heart beat violently against his hand, he felt it and stroked her hair soothingly. They were at one.

She spoke first: "I shall lie awake all night thinking. Perhaps I shall see you to-morrow? If you will?"

"Yes, to-morrow. Yes, I will! When to-morrow? Can I come at eight?"

"Yes.— Would you like me to wear this dress again?"

This touching question, the trembling of her lips, her wide eyes looking up at him, thrilled him to the heart. He answered: "Dearest, sweetest child, as you please! How good you are!— No, you mustn't lie awake to-night, you mustn't! Think of me and say good-night and go to sleep. You're not afraid to be here alone?"

"No.— Now you'll get wet going home."

Even that she thought of—that he'd get wet!

"Be happy and sleep well!" he said.

But as he was going out, he remembered something; he turned and said to her: "One more thing that I'd forgotten; I'm not a rich man. Did you think I was rich?"

"I don't know," she replied, shaking her head.

"No, I'm not rich. But we can buy ourselves a home and what we require; I'm rich enough for that. And then,

as time goes on, I shall see to everything; I shall bear all the burdens; that's what my hands are for.—You're not disappointed because I'm not rich, are you?"

She said: "No" and took his hands and pressed them once more. At last he told her to bolt the door well after him and stepped into the street.

It was pouring rain and very dark.

He did not go back to the hotel, but took the road out to the parsonage wood. He went on for a quarter of an hour; it was so dark that he could scarcely distinguish anything. At last he slackened his steps, left the road, and found his way to a big tree. It was an aspen-tree. There he halted.

The wind roared over the trees; the rain streamed down; otherwise all around him was still as death. He whispered something to himself, a name, Dagny, Dagny; paused and said it again. Then he spoke louder, said: "Dagny" in an audible voice. She had insulted him that evening, poured all her scorn upon his head; he could still feel in his breast every word she had flung at him, and yet he stood there speaking her name. He knelt down by the tree, took out his pocket-knife, and cut her name in the dark on its stem. This occupied him for several minutes; he felt his way, cut, and felt again till he had finished.—

He had taken his cap off while he was doing it.

On reaching the road he stopped, thought a moment, and turned again. He felt his way back to the tree, searched the trunk with his fingers, and found the letters again. He knelt a second time, leaned forward, and kissed this name, these letters, as though he would never see them again; at last he got up and walked rapidly away.

It was five o'clock when he reached the hotel.

XVII

THE same rain, the same dark, heavy weather next day. It seemed as if there was no end to this water that poured incessantly along the gutters and down the window panes. Hour after hour went by, the whole forenoon, and the sky did not clear. In the little garden behind the hotel all was bent and broken; the leaves were washed into the ground, buried in mud and wet.

Nagel stayed in all day, reading, as he paced up and down the room in his usual way, looking at the clock again and again. There was no end to the day! With the greatest impatience he waited for evening.

As soon as eight o'clock came, he went down to Martha's. He suspected nothing wrong, but she received him with a pained and very tearful face. He spoke to her and she answered briefly and evasively without meeting his eyes. She asked him several times to forgive her and not be annoyed.

When he took her hand, she began to quiver and tried to withdraw; but at last she did sit down in a chair beside him and stayed there till he left an hour later. What had happened? He pressed her with questions, asked for an explanation, and she had very little to say for herself.

No, she wasn't ill. She had only been thinking it over.—

Well, did that mean she repented her promise, that she didn't care for him perhaps?

Yes, that was it.—But forgive me and don't be an-

noyed! She had thought it over last night, the whole night long, and found it more and more impossible. Yes, she had consulted her heart too, and was afraid she couldn't care for him as she ought.

Ah, that was it!—Pause.—But didn't she think she could bring herself to be fond of him later? He had been looking forward to the chance of beginning a new life. Oh, he would be so kind to her!

This moved her; she pressed her hand to her bosom, but still looked down and said nothing.

Well, didn't she think he could make her care for him later on, if they were always together?

She whispered: "No." Two tears dropped from her long eyelashes.

Pause. His whole frame was trembling; the blue veins on his temples stood out sharply.

Well, well, well, then there was nothing to be done! She mustn't cry any more over that. It was all no good. She would have to forgive him his intrusion. He had meant it for the best.—

She seized his hand and held it fast. He was a little surprised at this sudden show of feeling and asked: Was there any special thing about him which offended her? He would correct it, make it good if it was in his power. Perhaps she didn't like——

She interrupted him: "No, there's nothing, nothing! But the whole thing's so inconceivable, and I don't even know who you are, for instance. Well, of course, I know that you wish me well; don't misunderstand me——"

"Who I am, for instance," he repeated, looking at her. All at once a suspicion flashed through his brain; he saw that something had undermined her confidence in him, something hostile had come between them, and he asked: "Has anyone been to see you to-day?"

She made no reply.

"Excuse me, it's of no consequence; I have no right to question you any more."

"Oh, how happy I was last night!" she said. "Heavens how I longed for morning and for you to come. But to-day I am full of misgivings."

"Will you just tell me one thing? So you don't believe I've been honest with you; you suspect me in spite of all?"

"No, not always. Oh, please don't be angry with me! You're such a stranger here; I don't know anything but what you tell me; perhaps you mean it honestly now, but will change your mind later. I don't know what your ideas are."

Pause.

Then he took her under the chin, raised her head slightly, and said: "And what else did Fröken Kielland say?"

She was taken aback, gave him a shy glance which betrayed her consternation, and exclaimed: "I didn't say so; no, I didn't, did I? I didn't say so!"

"No, no, you didn't say so." He was lost in thought; his eyes were fixed on one spot without seeing it. "No, you didn't say it was she; you didn't mention her name; don't be alarmed.—And yet Fröken Kielland has been here; she came in at that door and went out again the same way when she had done her business. It meant so much to her that she was forced to go out to-day, in this weather. How strange!—Dear, good Martha, kind soul, I kneel to you because you are good! Believe me all the same, believe me just for this evening, and then I'll show you later how little thought I have of deceiving you. Don't take back your promise now. Think it over once more, won't you? Think it over till to-morrow and then let me see you.—"

"Well, I don't know," she interrupted.

"You don't know? Then you would rather be rid of me once for all this evening? Ah well."

"I would rather come to you some day when you—well, when you're married and have got it ready—the house, I mean—I would rather come as your maid. Yes, that's what I'd like to do."

Pause. Ah, her distrust of him had already taken deep root; he could no longer control it, was incapable of putting her at her ease as he had done before. And he was distressed to feel that the more he talked, the farther she slipped from him. But why did she cry so? What was it that pained her? And why did she still hold his hand? He harked back to Minutten once more; it was a test; he would get her to grant him an interview next day, when she had considered it all again.

He said: "Forgive me for mentioning Minutten to you for the last time. Now take it calmly; I have my reasons for saying what I am going to say. I will say nothing bad about this person, on the contrary, you will remember I spoke of him as well as I knew how in your very ears. I thought there was a possibility that he might be my rival with you; that is why I spoke to you of him; amongst other things I suggested that he could provide for a family as well as anyone else, and I believe so still, if he had some help to start with. But you wouldn't hear of it; you had nothing to do with Minutten; you even asked me to stop talking about him. Good! But I've not yet got rid of all my suspicions; you haven't convinced me, and I ask you again whether there isn't something in the wind between you and Minutten? If so, I retire at once. Ah, you shake your head; but, for all that, I don't understand how you can refuse to consider the matter tomorrow and then give me an answer. That's nothing but simple justice. And you who are so kind!"

Then she yielded; yes, she rose to her feet; her emotion ran away with her and she stroked his hair, smiling through her tears, as she had done once before. She

would see him to-morrow, she would really; only he must come a little earlier, at four or five, while it was light; then nobody could say anything. But now he must go; it was better for him to go at once. Oh yes, he could come again to-morrow; she would be at home and would look out for him.—

What a strange child of an old maid! For the sake of a word, a half-uttered word, her heart flamed up and stirred her to tenderness, to smiles. She held his hand until he left, went to the door with him, still holding his hand. On the door-step she said good-night very loud, as though challenging someone who might be about.

The rain had stopped; at last it had almost stopped; here and there a patch of blue sky could already be seen among the murky clouds and only now and then a last drop of rain fell on the wet ground.

Nagel breathed more freely. Oh, he would win her confidence again; why shouldn't he? He did not go home; he strolled down the quays, along the shore, passed the last houses of the town, and entered the road to the parsonage. There was no one to be seen.

When he had gone a few steps along the road, a figure rose suddenly from the road-side and began to walk in front of him. It was Dagny; her plait of fair hair hung down her back outside her waterproof.

He was thrilled from head to foot and almost stood still for a moment; he was greatly surprised. So she hadn't gone to the bazaar this evening? Or was she only taking a stroll before the tableaux came on? Her movements were exceedingly slow; she even stopped once or twice to look up at the birds, which were beginning to fly from tree to tree. Had she seen him? Did she want to test him? Had she got up when he appeared so as to find out once more whether he would dare to approach her?

She could set her mind at rest; he would never trouble

her again! And suddenly his anger awoke, a blind, vague resentment against this person who was trying perhaps to tempt him once more to make a fool of himself, simply that she might have the satisfaction of humiliating him. She was quite capable of telling the people at the bazaar that he had met her again. Hadn't she just been to see Martha and headed him off there too? Couldn't she pull up now and not make more mischief for him? She had meant to pay him out, certainly, but she was overdoing it.

They walked at the same slow pace, one after the other; there was still fifty yards between them. This went on for several minutes. Then her handkerchief fell to the ground. He saw it flutter down her waterproof and come to rest in the road. Did she know she had dropped it?

And he said to himself that she wanted to test him; her rage had not yet abated; she wanted to get him to pick up this handkerchief and bring it to her; then she would have a chance of looking him in the face and really enjoying his defeat with Martha. His anger rose; he set his lips and frowned with passion. That was it of course; he was to present himself before her, show her his full face, and let her laugh him to scorn! Look, look, she dropped her handkerchief; there it was lying in the road, in the middle of the road; it was white and exceedingly dainty, a lace handkerchief, if you please; one might stoop down and pick it up.—

He did not hurry, and when he came to the handkerchief, he trod on it and walked on.

They went on like this for a few minutes longer; then he saw her look at her watch and turn abruptly. She was coming straight towards him. Had she missed her handkerchief? He turned too and walked slowly before her. When he reached the handkerchief, he trod on it again, for the second time and right in front of her eyes. And he walked on. He felt that she was just behind him, but he

did not hurry. They kept this up till they reached the town.

Sure enough, she turned her steps to the bazaar; he went up to his room.

He opened a window and leaned his elbows on the sill, shattered, crushed with emotion. His anger was past, he shrivelled up and fell to sobbing, with his head on his arms, silently, with dry eyes, sobbing so that his whole body shook. This was the end of it all! Oh how he repented it, how he wished it undone! She had thrown down her handkerchief, perhaps on purpose, perhaps to humiliate him, but what of that? He might have picked it up, stolen it, and kept it in his bosom for the rest of his life. It was white as snow and he had trampled it in the mud! Perhaps she would never have wanted to take it away from him if he had once had it in his hands; perhaps she would have let him keep it, God knows! But if after all she had held out her hand for it, he would have thrown himself on his knees and begged for it, implored her with outstretched hands to give it him as a souvenir, a mark of grace. And what would it have mattered if she had spurned him once more?

Suddenly he jumped up, took the stairs at a leap, dashed into the street, was out of the town in a couple of minutes and back on the parsonage road. Perhaps he could still find the handkerchief! And sure enough, she had let it lie, though he was certain she had seen him tread on it the second time. How lucky he was after all! Thank God! He pocketed it with beating heart, hurried home, and rinsed it in water, rinsed it in countless changes of water, and spread it out carefully. It was slightly damaged; one corner was torn by his heel; but what did that matter! Oh, how happy he was to have found it!

On sitting down again at the window he discovered that he had gone out the last time without a cap. Oh, he was

mad, he was mad! What if she had seen him! She had meant to try him, and when all was said and done he had failed miserably again. No, this would have to be put an end to at once! He must be able to meet her with a steady heart, head up, and cold eyes, without giving himself away. Ah, how he would try! He would go clean away and take Martha with him. She was far too good for him; ah, but he would make himself worthy of her; never rest, never give himself a moment's peace until he was worthy of her.

The weather was getting milder and milder; gentle puffs of wind brought the scent of raw earth and grass to his window and revived him more and more. Yes, to-morrow he would go back to Martha and humbly beg her consent.—

But by the morning of the next day his hopes were already shattered.

XVIII

FIRST came Dr. Stenersen; this was before Nagel was up. The doctor excused himself, but this blessed bazaar kept him busy night and day. Well, he had a message, a mission: he was deputed to persuade him—Nagel—to perform at the bazaar again that evening. His playing had started the most marvellous rumours; the town couldn't sleep for curiosity; positively true! "I see you read the papers. Ah, these politics! Did you notice the last appointments? After all, the elections didn't turn out quite as they should have done; no proper smack in the face for the Swedes.—You seem to take it pretty easy in the morning; it's ten o'clock. And such weather out of doors, dancing with heat! You ought to take a morning walk."

Yes, Nagel was just thinking of getting up.

Well, what answer was he to give the bazaar committee?

No, Nagel wouldn't play.

He wouldn't? But it was a question of patriotism; had he the right to refuse this little favour?

Well, he couldn't.

Good Lord, just when everybody was so enthusiastic about it! The ladies had positively laid siege to the Doctor last night to bring it off. Fröken Andresen had given him no peace and Fröken Kielland had actually taken him aside and begged him not to let Nagel go on any account until he had promised.

Well, but Fröken Kielland hadn't the smallest idea of how he played; she had never heard of him.

No, but she was the keenest of the lot all the same; she

had even offered to accompany him.—"She finished up by saying: 'Tell him we all beg him to come.'—I think you might play these dozen bars or so to oblige us."

He couldn't, he couldn't!

But look here, he was only trying to get out of it; he could play all right on Thursday night.

Nagel squirmed: suppose now he could play nothing but that wretched scrap, that disconnected pot-pourri; that he practised away at just that couple of dances for the sake of astonishing people one evening? And besides, he played shockingly out of tune; he couldn't bear to hear it himself, hanged if he could!

"Well, but——"

"Doctor, I won't do it!"

"But if not this evening, what about to-morrow evening? It's Sunday to-morrow, the last day of the bazaar, and we expect a lot of people."

"No, you must excuse me; I won't play to-morrow evening either. It's a silly thing anyhow to touch a violin when you can't play it better than I do. I am surprised *you* hadn't a better ear."

This appeal to the Doctor had its effect.

"Well," he said, "I did think you were a bit off here and there. But damn it all, everybody isn't a connoisseur."

It was no good; the Doctor had to take his refusal and go.

Nagel began to dress. So then even Dagny had been keen on getting him to play; she had actually offered to accompany him! Another trap, what? It didn't come off last time, and now she was trying to get her own back in this way?—Ah, well, he might be wronging her all the time; perhaps she had left off hating him; perhaps she would leave him in peace! And in his heart he asked her pardon for his suspicions. He looked out over the

square; there was glorious sunshine and the clearest of skies. He began humming to himself.

When he was nearly ready to go down, Sara handed him in a letter; it had not come by post, a messenger had brought it. The letter was from Martha and contained only a few lines: he must not come this evening after all; she had gone away. For God's sake, he must forgive her everything and not come any more; it would pain her to see him again. Good-bye. At the bottom of the page, underneath her name, she had added that she would never forget him. "I can never forget you," she wrote. The same tone of sadness ran through the three or four lines of this letter; even the writing had a melancholy, piteous look.

He sank into a chair. All was lost, lost! Even that door was closed against him! What a strange thing it was how everything conspired to defeat him! Had he ever in his life had better or more honest intentions than in her case? And yet, and yet it was no use! He sat motionless for several minutes.

All at once he jumped up from his chair; he looked at the clock, it was eleven; perhaps if he went at once, he could still catch Martha before she left. He made straight for her cottage; it was locked and empty. He looked in at the windows of both rooms, and there was no one to be seen.

He was struck dumb; he returned to the hotel without knowing where he was going, without lifting his eyes from the ground. How could she do it, how could she! At least he would have said good-bye to her and wished her every happiness wherever she went. He would at least have knelt to her for her goodness, for her purest of hearts; and she would have refused to let him kneel. Well, well, there was nothing to be done!

When he met Sara in the hall, he heard that the letter

had been brought by a messenger from the parsonage. So this too was Dagny's work; she had arranged the whole affair, had calculated accurately, and acted promptly. No, she was never going to forgive him!

All day long he strayed about in the street, in his room, in the woods, everywhere, with never a moment's rest. And all the time he walked with hanging head and wide eyes, which saw nothing.

The next day passed in the same way It was Sunday; a crowd of people from the country had come in to visit the bazaar and see the tableaux on the closing day; Nagel was again asked to play a single piece, this time by another member of the committee, Consul Andresen, Fredrikke's father; but he stuck to his refusal. For four whole days he went around like one insane, in a strange, absent state of mind, as though occupied by a single thought, a single feeling. Every day and several times a day he went down to Martha's cottage to see if she had come back. Where had she gone? But even if he found her, it would be no use to him now; nothing was of any use!

One evening he almost ran into Dagny. She was coming out of a shop and nearly grazed his elbow. She made a movement of the lips as though to speak to him, but suddenly turned red and said nothing. He did not quite recognize her at first, and in his flurry he stood staring at her a moment before turning abruptly and making off. She followed; he could hear by her steps that she was walking faster and faster; he had a feeling that she was trying to overtake him and he quickened his pace to get away, to hide from her; he was afraid of her; time after time she would bring him into trouble! At last he escaped to the hotel, dashed in, and hurried up to his room in the greatest alarm. Thank God, he was saved!

This was the 14th of July, a Tuesday.—

In the morning he appeared to have made a resolution to do something. In these few days his face had changed entirely; it was grey and stiff, and his eyes had no life in them. And it happened more and more frequently that he went a good way down the street before discovering that he had left his cap at the hotel. On these occasions he would say to himself that there must be an end of this; he'd have to put a stop to it; and as he said this, he clenched his fists savagely.

On getting out of bed Wednesday morning he first examined the little poison bottle in his waistcoat pocket, shook it, smelt it, and put it away again. Then, as he dressed, he began from old habit to wrestle with one of those long, intricate trains of thought which constantly possessed him and never gave rest to his weary head. His brain worked with monstrous, crazy rapidity; he was excited and in such agony of despair that he often had difficulty in restraining his tears, and in the midst of all this a thousand thoughts pressed upon him:

Ah, thank God, his little bottle was all right! It smelt of almonds and the liquid was clear as water. Oh yes, he'd have a use for it all the same; he'd want it very soon, if there was no other way. That was the end after all. And why not? He had dreamt such absurdly beautiful dreams about accomplishing something on earth, something that would count, some achievement that would make the meat-eaters sit up—and it had turned out badly; he had not been equal to the task. Why shouldn't he have use for the liquid? All he had to do was to swallow it without making too many faces. Well, well, he'd do it, in the fullness of time, when the clock struck.

And Dagny would win.—

What power that girl had, perfectly ordinary as she was, with her long plait of hair and her sensible heart! He understood the poor man who would not live with-

out her, the one with the steel and final NO. He was no longer surprised at him, the poor fellow had thrown in his hand, and what else was there for him to do?—

"How her blue velvet eyes will sparkle when I go the same way! But I love you; I love you for that too, not only for your virtues, but for your malice. Only you torture me too much with your forbearance; how can you put up with my having more than one eye? You ought to take the other, you ought to take both; you shouldn't allow me to walk along the street in peace and have a roof over my head. You have wrested Martha from me, I love you in spite of it, and you know I love you in spite of it, and it makes you snigger, and I love you for that too, for sniggering at it. Can you ask more? Isn't that enough? Your long, white hands, your voice, your fair hair, your breath, your soul, I love them all as I love nothing else and I can't stop myself and I can't control myself any longer, Lord help me! Ah, you're welcome to go on despising me heartily and laughing at me; what does it matter, Dagny, if I love you? I realize that it makes no difference one way or the other; as far as I'm concerned you may do whatever you please and you'll be just as beautiful and loveable in my eyes; I admit it freely. I have fallen short of your expectations in some way or other; you put me down as a bad lot; you think me capable of the worst. If I could get over my shortness of stature by some piece of trickery, I'd do even that. Well, and what then? If you say it, that's enough for me, that's good enough for me, and I assure you that my love starts singing within me when you say it. Even if you look at me slightingly, or turn your back on me without answering my question, or try to overtake me in the street to humiliate me, even then my heart thrills with love for you. Understand me, I'm not deceiving either of us now; but it's all

the same to me whether you laugh again; it doesn't alter my feeling; that is how it is. And if I found a diamond one day, I'd call it Dagny, simply because your name makes me go warm with joy. But I even go so far as to hear your name incessantly, to hear it spoken by all men and animals, all mountains and all stars, I would I were deaf to all else and only heard your name as an endless note in my ears night and day all my life long. I would I could institute a new oath in your honour, an oath to be used by all races on earth, in your sole honour. And if I sinned in this and God warned me against it, I would answer him: 'Put it down to me, record it against me, I'll pay for it with my soul, in the fullness of time, when the clock strikes.'—

"How strange everything is! I am checked in every direction and yet I am the same; my strength, my life is the same. The same possibilities are open to me as before. I could achieve the same things; why, then, am I checked and why have all my possibilities suddenly become impossible? Am I myself to blame? I don't know in what. I have all my senses; I have no injurious habits; I'm not subject to a single vice; I don't even plunge blindly into danger. I think as before, feel as before, am master of my movements as before; even my judgment of other people is unchanged. I go to Martha; I know that she is my salvation; she is the good soul, my good angel. She is frightened, terribly frightened, but at last she consents and we are at one. Good! I dream of a life of happy peace; we withdraw into solitude; we dwell in a cabin beside a spring; we wander about the woods, in short skirt and buckled shoes—just as her kindly, sentimental heart would have it. Why not? Mahomet goes to the mountain! And Martha is with me, Martha fills my days with purity and my nights with repose, and the Lord on high is above us. But now

the world pokes its nose in, the world is shocked, the world finds it mad. The world says this or that sensible man or woman would not have done it; consequently to do it is madness. And I come forward solitary and alone and stamp my foot and say that it *is* sensible! What does the world know? Nothing! We only accustom ourselves to a thing, we accept it, we acknowledge it, because our teachers have acknowledged it before us; everything is hypothesis pure and simple; why, even time, space, motion, matter, are hypotheses. The world knows nothing, it only takes for granted.—"

Nagel held his hands to his eyes a moment and swayed his head to and fro as though dizzy. He was standing in the middle of the room.

"What was it I was thinking about?— Good; she is frightened of me, but we are at one. And I feel in my heart that I shall be kind to her all my days. I will close my account with the world; I send back the ring; I have played the fool among other fools, I have been guilty of mad pranks, I have even played the violin, and the people have cried: 'Well roared, lion!' My gorge rises at the unspeakably vulgar triumph of hearing the meat-eaters clapping; I'm not going to compete any more with a telegraph clerk from Cable Bay; I'm going to the Valley of Peace and I shall be the most peaceful creature in the woods; I'll worship my God, hum songs of contentment, turn superstitious, shave only at high tide, and observe the cries of certain birds before sowing my corn. And when I am tired with my labour, my wife stands at the door beckoning me and I bless her and thank her for all her loving smiles.—Martha, we were at one, weren't we? And you promised so clearly, you really meant it at last, when I had explained it all? And then it came to nothing. You were carried off, caught unawares and carried off, not to your own, but to my destruction.—

"Dagny, I don't love you; you have checked me everywhere; I don't love your name; it drives me wild; I make mouths at it; I call you Dangny and put out my tongue; listen to me for Christ's sake! I'll come to you when the clock has struck and I am dead; I will appear to you on the wall with a face like the knave of clubs and I'll haunt you as a skeleton, dance around you on one leg, and paralyse your arms with my grip. I'll do it, I'll do it! God preserve me from you now and evermore—I mean, devil take you, as I devoutly pray.—

"And what then? For the last time of asking, what then? I love you all the time, and, Dagny, you know very well that I love you all the time and I regret all my bitter words. But what then? What good does it do me? And besides, who knows if it isn't better thus? If you say it's better thus, then it is so; I feel the same as you, and you've put a stop to my wanderings. But if you had consented, if you had broken with all the rest and bound yourself to me—which I didn't deserve, but anyhow let us suppose it—what would that have led to? At the most you would have wanted to help me perform my great deeds, achieve something in the world—I tell you it makes me ashamed; my heart stops still with shame when I think of it. I should do as you wished because I love you, but I should suffer for it in my soul.—Well, what on earth's the good of supposing one thing after another, of setting up impossible points of departure? You wouldn't break with all the rest and bind yourself to me; you say no thank you, laugh in my face, spurn me; so what have I to do with you? Full stop."

Pause. Then, vehemently: "Now, let me tell you that I'm going to drink this good glass of water and let you go to hell. It is unspeakably foolish of you to think I love you, to think I should actually take the trouble now, when the fullness of time is so near. I loathe your

whole shopkeeping existence, neat and spruce and trumpery as it is. I loathe it, God knows I do, and I feel my indignation within me like a pentecostal wind when I think of you. What would you have made of me? I'll swear you'd have turned me into a great man. He he, go and show thyself to the priests! My heart is filled with shame at your great men.—

"A great man! How many great men are there in the world? First there are the great men in Norway; they are the greatest. Then there are the great men in France, in the land of Hugo and the poets. Then come the great men over in Barnum's realm. And all these great men have to keep their balance on a globe which in comparison to Sirius is no bigger than the back of a louse. But a great man is no little man; a great man doesn't live in Paris, he fills Paris. A great man stands so high that he can look over the top of his own head; Lavoisier asked to have his execution postponed till he had completed a chemical experiment; in other words, 'Don't tread on my circles!' he said. What a farce! When you think that not even Euclid, no, not even Euclid with his axioms, contributed more than a farthing to basic values! Oh, how poor and frugal a thing we have made of God's earth, how little we have to be proud of!

"Here we go making great men out of any chance professionals who happen to have improved electrical apparatus or who happen to have muscle enough to pedal themselves through Sweden on a bicycle. Yes, and we get great men to write books for promoting the worship of great men! He he, it's really amusing; it's worth the money! The end of it will be that every village will have its great man, a graduate of laws, a novelist, a polar skipper of immense size. And the world will become so admirably flat and simple and easy to take in——

"Dagny, now it's my turn: I say no thank you; I laugh

in your face; I spurn you; so what have you to do with me? I shall never be a great man.—

"But let us just assume that there is an immense mass of great men, a legion of geniuses of such and such a size; why shouldn't we assume it? But what then? Should I be impressed by their number? On the contrary, the more of that sort, the more ordinary they'd be. Or should I do as the world does? The world never changes; it will accept to-day what the world has accepted before; it will admire, fall on its knees, run at the great men's heels, and shout hurrah. And you want me to do that too? Farce, farce! The great man walks along the street, and one mortal prods another mortal in the ribs and says: There goes this or that great man! The great man sits in the theatre, and one schoolmistress pinches another schoolmistress in the unsexed thigh and whispers: There, in that stage box, sits this or that great man! And what of the great man himself? He swallows it all. Yes, he does. These mortals are right, he thinks; he accepts their attention as his due; he doesn't despise it; he doesn't blush. And why should he blush? Isn't he a great man?

"But here young Student Oien would protest. He is going to be a great man himself; he's writing a novel in his vacation. He would point out my inconsistency again: 'Herr Nagel, you're not consistent; make your meaning clear!'

"And I would make my meaning clear.

"But young Oien would not allow himself to be satisfied; he would ask: 'Then in point of fact there are no great men?'

"Yes, that's what he'd ask, even after I'd made my meaning clear! That's the way it would look to him. Well, anyhow I'd make him the best answer I could; I'd get into my stride and answer him: 'The plain fact of the matter is that there's a whole legion of great men; do you

hear what I say? There's a legion of them! But of the *greatest* men there are not many; no, there are not. You see, that's the difference. Soon there'll be a great man to every village; but of the greatest men perhaps we shall never see more than one in a millenium. What the world understands by a great man is just a talent, a genius; and, bless me, genius is a very democratic term; so many pounds of beefsteak per day will produce genius in the third, fourth, fifth, tenth generation. Genius in the popular sense is nothing unheard of; a genius is only something to talk about; it makes you pull up, but it doesn't knock you flat. Imagine you're in an observatory on a clear night looking through a telescope at the nebula of Orion. Then you hear Fearnley say: "Good-evening, good-evening!" * You turn round, Fearnley bows deeply, a great man has entered, a genius, the gentleman of the stage box. And then you smile slightly to yourself and turn again to the Orion nebula; isn't that so? This happened to me once.—Have you got my meaning? What I say is that, rather than admire the ordinary great men who make mortals nudge each other in the ribs with awe, I prefer the little, unknown geniuses, youths who die in their school-days because their soul shatters them, delicate, dazzling glow-worms that one must have met while they were alive or one will never know of their existence. That is my taste. But above all I say that we have to distinguish between the highest genius and the high; we have to support the highest lest it be swamped in the proletariat of geniuses. I want to see the arch-mind in his right place; make a selection, for goodness' sake; see if you can shake me; rid me of the village geniuses. What we have to do is to find the paragon, His Eminence the Paragon.—'

* Carl Frederik Fearnley, an eminent Norwegian astronomer who was living at the date of this story.—Tr.

"To which young Oien would say—oh yes, I know him; he'd say: 'But really this is only theory, paradox.'

"And I'm incapable of seeing that it's only theory; God help me, I'm incapable of it, so fatally different is my view of things. Is it my fault? I mean, am I personally to blame for it? I am a stranger, an alien in life, God's fixed idea, call me what you like——"

With growing excitement: "And I tell you all, I don't care what you call me; I'll never give up, never in this world. I clench my teeth and harden my heart because I'm right; I will stand alone, one man against the world, and not give in! I know what I know, in my heart I'm right; sometimes, at certain moments, I can divine the infinite connection in all things. I have still something to add which I forgot; I won't yield: I will lay low all your silly hypotheses about great men. Young Oien asserts that my opinion is only a theory. Good; if my opinion is a theory, I'll knock it down and put up another that's even better; I stick at nothing. And I say—wait a bit, I'm convinced I can say something better still, because my heart is full of justice; I say I despise and scoff at the great man in the stage box; my heart tells me he's a buffoon and a clown; my lips curl with scorn when I see his puffed-up chest and his look of assurance. Has the great man himself achieved his genius? Wasn't he born with it? Why then greet him with hurrahs?

"And young Oien asks: 'But you yourself would set His Eminence the Paragon in his proper place; you yourself admire the arch-mind, which did not achieve its own genius either?'

"And young Oien thinks he's caught me in another inconsistency; that's how it looks to him! But I answer him again, since holy justice has taken hold of me: 'I don't admire the arch-mind, if it comes to that; I smash even His Eminence the Paragon and sweep the earth clean.

People admire the arch-mind for its greatness, for its paragon of genius—as though its genius were the merit of the arch-mind itself, as though its genius did not belong to common humanity and were not literally the property of matter! That the arch-mind happens to have absorbed his great-grandfather's, his grandfather's and his father's, his son's, his grandson's, and his great-grandson's share of genius and exhausted the stock for centuries—this is not, no, it is not the fault of the arch-mind himself. He found the genius within him, saw what it was for, and used it.—Theory? No, it is *not* theory; bear in mind that it is my heart that tells me this! But if this too is theory, then I'll ransack my brain for another solution and I'll come out with a third, a fourth, and yet a fifth glaring contradiction, the best I can find; I'll not be beaten.'

"But young Oien won't be beaten either, for he has the whole world at his back; he says: 'Then you have nothing left to admire, no great man, no genius!'

"And I answer him and make him feel more and more uncomfortable; for he is going to be a great man himself. I throw another wet blanket over him and reply: 'No, I don't admire genius. But I admire and love the result of its activity in the world, of which the great man is only the poor necessary instrument, the miserable awl to make holes with, you may say.—Is that all right now? Have you got me now?' "

Suddenly stretching out his hands: "Oh, there again I had a glimpse of the infinite connexion in all things! How bright it was, how bright! The great solution came upon me just now, this moment, here in this room! There were no more riddles for me; I saw to the bottom of everything. How bright it was, how bright!"

Pause.

"Well, well, well, well, well, well! I am a stranger among my fellow-men, and soon the clock will strike.

Well, well.—And when all's said and done, what have I to do with the great men? Nothing! Only that it's a farce and a humbug and a fraud with these great man. Good! But isn't everything farce and humbug and fraud? Why certainly, everything is a fraud. Kamma and Minutten and all men and women and love and life are frauds; all that I see and hear and feel is a fraud; even the blue of the sky is ozone, poison, insidious poison.—And when the sky is really clear and blue, I sail about up there; I let my boat ripple on over the treacherous blue ozone. And the boat is of scented wood, and the sail——

"Dagny herself said it was so beautiful. Dagny, you said that, and, yes, I thank you for saying it and making me happy once more, making me quiver with joy. I remember every word and carry it with me as I walk along the roads thinking of it all; I shall never forget it.—And now you are going to win when the hour strikes. I will haunt you no more. And I won't appear to you on the wall either; you must forgive me for saying that in my vindictiveness. No, I will come and fan you with white wings while you sleep and follow you while you wake and whisper many a good word in your ear. Perhaps you will even smile back at me when you hear it; yes, perhaps you will even do that, if you will. But if I am not given white wings myself, if my wings don't happen to be so very white, then I'll ask an angel of God to do it in my place, and I won't approach you myself, but will hide in a corner to see if you smile at him. That's what I'll do if I can, to make good some of the worst things I've done to you. Oh, it makes me happy to think of it and I long to get it done at once. And perhaps I can please you in other strange ways. I should like to sing above your head every Sunday morning as you are on your way to church, and I'll ask the angel to do that too. But if he won't do it for me and I can't persuade him, then I'll prostrate myself

before him and beg him so humbly that he will have to grant my prayer. I'll promise him something good for this and I'll give him something too and I'll do him ever so many services if he will be so kind.—Ay, ay, I'll work it, and I'm longing to begin; I'm delighted at the idea of it. And it won't be long now before the time comes; I'll hurry it on myself and even be happy to do so.—Fancy when every mist has vanished, la la la la——"

He ran downstairs in exultation and entered the dining-room, still singing. Then a trifling chance put an end to his elation and embittered him for several hours. He sang as he made a hurried lunch, standing up at the table, though he was not alone. On noticing that the other two boarders were looking scandalized he hastily begged their pardon: if he had noticed them before, he would have behaved more quietly. He saw and heard nothing on days like this; wasn't it a glorious morning? How the flies were buzzing already!

But he received no answer; the two strangers looked as sour as before and talked politics to one another solemnly. Nagel's spirits fell at once; he said no more and left the room in silence. He went into a shop in the street for a supply of cigars and then took his usual road to the woods. It was half past eleven.

Well, weren't people always the same! There sat these two lawyers or salesmen or farmers, or whatever they were, there they sat in the dining-room talking politics and looking savage and sour just because a cheerful man happened to hum a little in their hearing. And they chewed their lunch with a look of immense intelligence and could put up with no interruption. They both had pendulous bellies and fat, puffy fingers; their napkins were tucked under their chins. He'd be doing his duty if he went back to the hotel and jeered at them a bit. What sort of high-born gentlemen were they? Bagmen in grain,

in American hides, God knows if they didn't carry vulgar crockery. Something to make you fall over backwards, wasn't it? And yet it was enough to kill this happy mood in an instant. For the matter of that they were not too good-looking either; well, one of them didn't look so bad, but the other—the fellow with the hides—had a crooked mouth which only opened at one end, so that it looked like a buttonhole. And he had a lot of grey hair growing out of his ears. Faugh, he was as unappetizing as the plague! But there it was, no singing allowed while that man had his nose in the food trough!

Yes, people were indeed always the same, that they were. The gentlemen talk politics; the gentlemen have seen the last official appointments; thank God, Buskerud might still be snatched from the Conservatives! How priceless it was to watch their mine-owner's faces as they said it. As though Norwegian politics was anything but gin-bar sagacity and clownish log-rolling! I, Listerbu Ola Olsen, will vote for a compensation not exceeding one hundred and seventy-five crowns for a widow in Nordland, provided I get in return three hundred crowns for a road in Fjære parish, Ryfylke. He he, log-rolling!

"But, death and damnation, don't start singing a cheerful song and disturb Storting-Ola at his work! For that thou shalt be cuffed soundly. For, mark ye, Ola is thinking; Ola is considering. What does he perpend, what political motion will he produce to-morrow? A man of trust in Norway's little universe, elected by the people to take up his cues in the country's comedy, clad in the holy national frieze, with his short pipe puffing clouds of plug and his paper collar soggy with true and honest sweat. Out of the way for the People's Chosen; stand aside, damn you, and give him elbow room!

"Oh, good God, isn't it always the fat round noughts that make the total big?—

"Full stop, by the way, and to hell with your noughts! One gets sick of humbug at last and won't be bothered to touch it any more. One goes to the woods and lies down under the open sky; there one finds space, more room for the stranger among men and for the birds in their flight. —And you find yourself a bed in a wet spot, lie on your stomach on the raw, swampy ground, and positively enjoy getting sadly drenched. And you dig your head into the reeds and spongy leaves, and worms and insects and soft little lizards crawl over your clothes and into your face and look at you with silky, green eyes, while all around you whispers the calm silence of air and forest, and while the Lord God sits on high staring down at you as at the most fixed of all his fixed ideas. Your spirits rise, you feel a rare, strange, and devilish joy that you have never known before; you do every mad thing you can think of, mix up right and wrong, turn the world upside-down and rejoice over it as though it were a meritorious act. Why not? You're under queer influences and you yield to them, let yourself be swept along by fancy and callous joy. All the things you used to jeer at you now feel an inordinate desire to exalt to the skies: you hug yourself with the idea of striking a little imperial blow for universal peace; you'd like to appoint a commission for improving the postmen's shoes; you'd put in a good word for Pontus Wikner and vindicate the universe and God in general.* Devil may take the true connection in all things; that doesn't concern you any more; you let out a roar at it and there's an end. Ho ho and deia, the sun's shining on heia! Come now, you let yourself go a little; tune your harp and sing psalms and psongs that baffle description!

"On the other hand you let your inner self drift at the

* Carl Pontus Wikner, Swedish writer on popular philosophy and religion. His collected sermons and lectures were published in 1889.—Tr.

mercy of winds and waves, the sport of any balderdash. Let it drift, let it drift; it's pleasant to yield unresistingly. And why should you resist? May a checked wanderer be permitted to arrange his last moments as it may please himself? Yes or no? Full stop. And you arrange to please yourself.

"Now there is one thing you could do: you could make your influence felt on behalf of home missions, of Japanese art, of the Hallingdal Railway, of anything you like, so long as you make your influence felt for something and help something on to its feet. It occurs to you that a man like J. Hansen, the esteemed tailor, from whom on one occasion you bought a coat for Minutten—that this man possesses extraordinary merits as a human being and a citizen; you begin by respecting him and end by loving him. Why do you love him? From fancy, from defiance, from callous joy, because you're in the grip of certain strange influences and yield to them. You whisper your admiration in his ear; you sincerely wish him wealth in abundance, both great and small, and on leaving him, God help me, you slip your own life-saving medal into his hand. Why shouldn't you do that when you're yielding to these peculiar influences? But that's not going far enough; you next repent of having possibly said disrespectful things of Storting-Ola. Now at last you're really making yourself the sport of the most luscious lunacy; how you let yourself go!

"What hasn't Storting-Ola done for Ryfylke and the country! Bit by bit your eyes are opened to his faithful, honest labours, and your heart melts. Your humanity runs away with you; you sob and weep with compassion for him and swear in your soul to make him amends, twofold, threefold amends. The thought of this old boy from the ranks of the struggling and suffering People, the man in the homely frieze, throws you into a wild and blissful

ardour of charity which makes you howl. In order to make amends to Ola you blacken the whole world besides, take delight in plundering all the rest to his advantage, make search for the most extravagantly blessed words in order to glorify him. You actually assert that Ola did most of the things that have been done in the world, that he wrote the only treatise on spectral analysis that is worth reading, that he is really the only man who in the year 1719 ploughed up the whole of America's prairies, that he invented the telegraph, and that to cap all he's been up to Saturn and talked with God five times. You know very well that Ola didn't do *all* these things, but still in your desperate goodness you say he *did,* he *did,* and you shed hot tears and swear and damn yourself recklessly to the fiercest torments of hell that it was precisely Ola and nobody else who did it. Why do you do this? From kindness of heart, to make amends to Ola many times over! And you strike up a song to give him rousing reparation; ay, you sing a lewd and blasphemous song to the effect that it was Ola who created the world and set the sun and stars in their places and has kept them there ever since, and to this you append a long string of horrid oaths to the truth of it. In short, you allow your thoughts to abandon themselves to the most unheard-of, the most rapturous profligacy in the way of kindness of heart, to the most libidinous dallying with oaths and profanity. And every time you've found something really unique to say, you draw up your knees under you and chuckle with delight at the felicitous amends Ola is going to get. Oh yes, Ola shall have it all; Ola deserves it because you once spoke disrespectfully of him, and now you regret it."

Pause.

"What was it now, didn't I once make some silly remark about a body which—which died—wait a bit, it was a

young girl; she died and thanked God for the loan of her body, which she had never used. Stop! it was Mina Meek; now I remember and it makes me ashamed from top to toe. What a lot of things one says at random that afterwards make one repent and groan with shame—bring you up short with shame and make you shriek aloud! True, it was only Minutten that heard it, but I'm ashamed of it for my own sake. Not to mention that I once made an even more ignominious bloomer which I'll never forget, about an Eskimo and a blotter. Ugh, get away—Lord, how I'd like to sink into the ground!—Quiet now, ears stiff, to hell with scruples! Think of when in heaven above the legions of the blest shall meet upon that wondrous day and enter into rest; are you in on that? O my God, what a dull business it is; my *God,* what a dull business it is.—"

On reaching the woods Nagel threw himself down in the first tuft of heather and hid his face in his hands. What a turmoil in his brain, what a swarm of impossible thoughts! In a little while he fell asleep. It was not more than four hours since he got up, and yet he fell asleep, dead tired and utterly exhausted.

It was evening when he awoke. The sun was just going down behind the steam mill on the fjord, and the little birds flew singing from tree to tree. His head was in the best of order, his confused thoughts had vanished with his bitterness, he was perfectly calm. He leaned against the trunk of a tree and reflected. Should he do it now? this was as good as any other time. No, he had several things to arrange first, a letter to be written to his sister, a little memento in an envelope for Martha; he couldn't die this evening. He hadn't settled his hotel bill either; he'd like to remember Minutten too.—

And with slow steps he went home to the hotel. But to-morrow night it should be done, at midnight, without any fuss at all, short and straight!

At three o'clock in the morning he was still standing at the window of his room, looking out over the square.

XIX

AND the next night about twelve Nagel at last left the hotel. He had made no preparations, but he had written to his sister and had put some money in an envelope for Martha; beyond that everything was in its usual place, his trunks, his violin case, and the old chair he had bought; and several books were lying casually on his table. He hadn't paid his bill either; he'd entirely forgotten it. Just now, before leaving, he had asked Sara to dust the windows before he came back, and Sara had promised to do so, though it was the middle of the night; then he washed his face and hands elaborately and left the room.

He was calm all the time, almost stolid. Good Lord, what was it to get in a stew and make a song about? A year sooner or later was neither here nor there; besides, it was a thing he'd had in his mind a long time. And now he was absolutely dead tired of disappointments, of hopes that came to nothing, of the humbug everywhere, the finicking, everyday deceit on all sides. Once again he thought of Minutten, whom he had remembered after all with an envelope and something in it, though his suspicion of the wretched, crippled dwarf never left him. He thought of Fru Stenersen, asthmatic and ill, who deceived her husband before his very face and never showed a sign; of Kamma, that little money-grubbing hussy who stretched her false arms after him wherever he went and had never done ransacking his pockets for more, always more. East and west, at home and abroad, he had found people the same; nothing but vulgarity and shams and shameful

faithlessness, from the beggar who wore a bandage on his sound hand to the blue sky, which was full of ozone. And he himself, was he any better himself? No, no, he was no better himself! But now he'd come to the end of it.

He took the road to the quays to have a last look at the ships, and on passing the farthest pier he suddenly took the iron ring from his finger and threw it into the sea. He saw it drop a long way out. There! at the last moment we'll do our little best to be rid of humbug.

He halted at Martha Gude's cottage and looked in at the window for the last time. Everything was as usual, quiet and peaceful, no one to be seen.

"Good-bye!" he said.

And he passed on.

Without knowing it he directed his steps towards the parsonage. He did not see how far he had come till he caught sight of the yard in a clearing of the woods. He stopped short—where was he going? What was he doing on this road? A last glance at the two windows on the first floor, a vain hope of seeing a face which never showed itself, never—no, that was not the way! True, he'd meant to do it all the time, but one didn't do that kind of thing! He stood a little while looking into the parsonage yard with longing eyes, wavering, with a silent prayer.—

"Good-bye!" he said once more.

Then he turned abruptly into a side track which led farther into the wood.

Now the thing was to follow his nose and fix on the first place that offered. Above all, no calculation and no sentimentality; how ridiculous Karlsen had made himself in his despair! As though a trifling affair of this sort was worth all that fuss!—He found one of his shoestrings was undone and stopped, put his foot on a tuft, and tied it. Soon after he sat down.

He sat down without thinking, without knowing it. He looked around: tall firs, everywhere tall firs, here and there a juniper bush, the ground covered with heather. Good, good!

Then he takes out his wallet with the letters to Martha and Minutten in it. In a separate compartment lies Dagny's pocket-handkerchief wrapped in paper, and he takes it out, kisses it again and again, and then tears it slowly into little strips. This takes him a long time; one o'clock comes, half past one, and he's still tearing it into tiny strips. At last he has made the handkerchief quite unrecognizable; there's not much more than threads left; he gets up and puts it underneath a stone, hides it well, so that nobody can find it, and sits down again. Well, there's nothing more, is there? And he reflects, but there is nothing more. Then he winds his watch, as usual before going to bed.

He takes a look around him; the wood is rather dark; he can see nothing suspicious. He listens, holds his breath and listens; there is not a sound, the birds are silent, the night is mild and lifeless. And he slips his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and brings out the little bottle.

The bottle has a glass stopper, and over the stopper is a triple paper cap tied with blue druggist's string. He loosens the string and takes out the stopper. Clear as water, with a faint smell of almonds! He holds the bottle up to his eyes; it is half full. At that moment he hears a sound far away, a couple of mournful strokes; it is the church clock striking two. He whispers: "The clock has struck!" And quickly he raises the bottle to his lips and empties it.

For the first few moments he still sat upright with closed eyes, holding the bottle in one hand and the stopper in the other. It had all gone so slick that he didn't quite realize it. Now it was over the thoughts gradually came

back to him; he opened his eyes and looked around in a dazed way. All this, these trees, this sky, this earth, he was never to see again. How strange that was! The poison was already stealing about inside him, penetrating the fine tissues, forcing its blue way into his veins; soon he would be in convulsions; a little later he would be lying stiff.

He noticed an unmistakable bitter taste in his mouth and felt his tongue gathering. Then he made wild gestures with his arms to see how far he was dead already, began to count the trees, got as far as ten and gave it up. Oh, was he to die, was he really to die to-night? No; oh, surely no? No, not to-night, what? How strange it was!

Yes, he was to die, he plainly felt the acid taking effect in his entrails. No, why now, why at once? God, it mustn't come just now! No, it mustn't surely? How dark it was getting already! How the wood was roaring, though there wasn't a breath of wind! And what were those red clouds floating above the tree-tops?—Ah, not at once, not at once! No, look here, no! What shall I do? I won't! God in heaven, what shall I do!

And all at once a world of thoughts assailed him with overwhelming force. He was not prepared; there were a thousand things to be done first and his brain flashed and gleamed with all the things he had to do. He hadn't yet paid his hotel bill, he'd forgotten it; yes, upon his soul it had slipped his memory and he wanted to put it right! No, he must be spared for the night; mercy, mercy for one hour, a little over an hour! Great God, and there was another letter he'd forgotten, one more letter, a couple of lines to a man in Finland, about his sister; her whole fortune depended on it!—So fully conscious was he in his desperation and with such strange intensity was his brain working that he even worried about his subscription to the various papers he took. No, he hadn't stopped his papers

either; they would arrive continually; they'd never stop; they'd fill his room from floor to ceiling. What could he do about it? And now he was nearly half dead!

He pulled up heather with both hands, threw himself on his stomach, and tried to bring up the poison, thrusting his fingers down his throat, but in vain. No, he wouldn't die, not to-night, not to-morrow either; he would never die, he would live, he would look on the sun for an eternity yet. And this drop of poison was not going to stay in him; up it should come before it killed him, up, up, by all the devils it should come up!

Mad with terror he sprang to his feet and staggered through the wood in search of water. And he shouted: "Water, water!" till the echo answered far away. He raged in this way for several minutes, running round in all directions, charging into tree-trunks, leaping high over juniper bushes, and groaning aloud. And he found no water. At last he stumbled and fell on his face, his hands dug into the peaty earth, and in falling he felt a slight pain in one cheek. He tried to move, to get up; the fall had dazed him; he sank back, growing weaker and weaker, and rose no more.

Well, well, in God's name, there was no way out of it! And, Lord God, he was to die after all! Perhaps if he'd had strength enough to find water somewhere, he might have been saved! Oh, what a bad end he was coming to, when he had imagined something very different. Now he was to die by poison under the open sky! But why wasn't he stiff already? He could still move his fingers, raise his eyelids; what a time it took, what a time it took!

He passed his hand over his face; it was cold and drenched with sweat. He had fallen forwards, with his head downhill, and he lay where he was and made no effort to move. Every limb of his body was still trembling; he had a cut on one cheek and he let it bleed.

What a time it took, what a time it took! And he lay waiting patiently. Again he heard the church clock strike —three. He gave a start; could he have had the poison in him a whole hour and not be dead? He raised himself on his elbow and looked at his watch; yes, it was three o'clock. How long it did take!

Well, in God's name, it was best after all for him to die now! And suddenly remembering that he was going to sing to Dagny every Sunday morning and do her all manner of good things, he was resigned to his fate, and tears came into his eyes. Sentimentally, amid prayers and silent weeping, he began to go over in his mind all the things he would do for Dagny. Oh, how he would protect her from all evil! Perhaps that very morning he would be able to fly to her and be near her; good God, if he could do that already and make her wake up radiantly happy! It was horrid of him not to want to die when he might give her pleasure; yes, he regretted it and asked her forgiveness; what could he have been thinking of? But now she could depend on him; he longed to come floating into her room and stand at the foot of her bed. In a few hours, perhaps in one hour, he would be there; yes, he would be there. And he'd be quite certain to get an angel of God to do it for him if he couldn't do it himself; he'd promise him all sorts of good things for doing it. And he'd say: "I'm not white, but you can do it, you're white, and you may do what you like with me in return. You look at me because I'm black? Certainly I'm black; what is there to stare at? But I don't mind promising to stay black a long, long time yet if you'll do me the favour I ask you. I can be black for an extra million years, and much blacker than I am now, if you ask it; and for every Sunday you sing to her we can add another million years if you like. I'm not lying, I'll think of all sorts of things to offer you, and I won't spare my-

self. Listen now! You shan't fly alone, I'll be with you and I'll hold you up and fly for both of us, I'll do it with pleasure and I shan't stain you either, even if I am black. I'll do all the work and you can rest the whole time. Goodness knows if I couldn't make you some present, something you might want. I'll bear it in mind in case anyone gives me anything; I might be lucky and earn quite a lot of things for you; one never knows.—"

Oh yes, in the end he'd persuade an angel of God to do this thing for him, he was sure of that.—

And once more the church clock struck. Half absently he counted the four strokes and thought no more of it. Patience was the thing. So he clasped his hands and prayed to be allowed to die quickly, in a few minutes' time; then perhaps he'd be able to visit Dagny before she woke. He would give thanks and praise to all for this great mercy, and now he had but this one fervent wish.—

He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

He slept for three hours. When he woke, the sun was shining down on him and the wood resounded with the loud twittering of birds. He sat up and looked about him —and suddenly remembered all that had happened that night; the bottle still lay beside him and he recalled how earnestly he had prayed to God at last to be allowed to die quickly. And he was still alive! Once more some unlooked-for evil chance had crossed his path! He couldn't make it out at all; he racked his brains in vain and all he knew was that he was not dead yet!

He stood up, took the bottle with him, and walked a few steps. Ah, how was it he always came upon some obstacle when he honestly tried to do something? What was wrong with the poison? It was genuine prussic acid; a doctor had told him it was enough, ay, more than enough; besides, he had stretched the parson's dog stone-

dead with a taste of it. And it was the selfsame bottle; it was half full; he remembered seeing that with his own eyes before he emptied it. The bottle had never been in others' hands either; he had always carried it in his waistcoat pocket. Oh, what perfidious powers could they be that followed him secretly wherever he went?

It struck him in a flash that the bottle *had* been in strange hands after all. He stopped short and snapped his fingers unconsciously. Yes, there was no mistake about it; Minutten had had it in his possession a whole night. It was at his bachelor party in the hotel, when he gave Minutten his waistcoat; the bottle, his watch, and a lot of papers were still in the pockets; Minutten had brought the things back early next morning. Oh, that half-witted old cripple, he'd been there again with his flagrant goodness! What cunning, what a deep-laid trick!

Nagel clenched his teeth in exasperation. What had he said that night in his room? Didn't he expressly declare that he hadn't the courage to use the poison on himself? And that rotten, hypocritical, wizened deformity sat on a chair by his side and in all secrecy disbelieved his word! The wretch, the burrowing mole! He'd gone straight home, emptied the bottle, perhaps he'd even rinsed it a few times, and then filled it half up with water. And after that noble deed he'd gone to bed and slept peacefully!

Nagel started to walk towards the town. He was rested more or less and could think clearly and bitterly. The night's doings had humiliated him and made him ridiculous in his own eyes. Fancy, he'd actually smelt almonds in this water, felt his tongue contracted by this water, had a sensation of approaching death from this water! And he'd raged about and jumped sky-high over stock and stone, all for a mouthful of perfectly ordinary baptismal spring water! Angry and red with shame he

stopped and shrieked aloud; but the next moment he looked about him, afraid someone might have heard, and tried to carry it off by singing.

And as he went along, his feelings grew calmer in the bright, warm morning air with the ceaseless song of birds. A cart came towards him, the driver gave a greeting, and Nagel returned it; a dog following the cart wagged its tail and looked up in his face.—But why hadn't he managed to die fairly and squarely that night? He was still sorry about it; he had lain down to rest with an agreeable sense that this was the end; a gentle joy had overspread him until he closed his eyes and went to sleep. Now Dagny was up, perhaps she had already gone out, and he hadn't been able to do a single thing to please her. How ignominiously he had been betrayed! Minutten had added one more kindness to all the rest of which his heart was full; he had done him a service, had saved his life—precisely the same service as he himself had once rendered a stranger, an unfortunate man who didn't want to land at Hamburg. It was on that occasion he earned his life-saving medal; *earned* it! Oh yes, one rescues people; one doesn't hesitate to do a good deed now and then; one goes at it boldly and pulls people out of the jaws of death!

He sneaked up to his room at the hotel, feeling pretty small, and sat down. The room was neat and cosy; the windows had been cleaned and fresh curtains put up. On the table was a bunch of wild flowers in water. He had never before had flowers there; the sight of them gave him a pleased surprise and made him rub his hands. What a lucky chance, to-day of all days! What a charming idea of a poor chambermaid! A good girl, that Sara! Yes, it was really a delightful morning. Every face in the market square below was a happy one; the man with the plaster figures sat at his table smoking his

clay pipe complacently though he hadn't sold a thing. Perhaps it wasn't such a bad thing after all that his wild plans of last night had come to naught! He thought with a shudder of the terror he had gone through when he was tearing about after water; it still made him shaky to think of it, and sitting safely in his chair in this bright and friendly room, with the sun pouring in, he had at that moment a delightful sense of being saved from all evil. But when all was said and done, there remained one excellent and unfailing resource which he hadn't tried. One's plans might miscarry a trifle the first time; one didn't die, one got up again; but what would you say to a safe little six-shooter that you could get at the nearest gunsmith's whenever you wanted it? The thing would keep.—

Sara knocked. She had heard him go up and came to tell him breakfast was ready. He called her back and asked if the flowers were from her.

Yes, they were from her; it was not worth any thanks.

He shook hands with her all the same.

She asked with a smile: "Where have you been all night? You've only just come home!"

"Look here," he replied; "that idea about the flowers was absolutely charming of you; you've cleaned the windows too and changed my curtains. I can't tell you how pleased I am; I'm very grateful to you."—And suddenly he had one of those mad fits which made him a prey to his humour, to every chance caprice, and he said: "I say, I had a fur coat with me when I came here. Goodness knows what's become of it, but I positively had a fur coat with me and I'm going to make you a present of it. Oh yes, to show my gratitude; my mind's made up, the coat is yours."

Sara broke into a hearty fit of laughter. What should she do with a fur coat?

Well, there was something to be said for that, but it was her affair; he only asked her to accept it, to do him the pleasure of accepting it.—And her cheery laugh compelled him to join in; he began joking with her: Jove, what pretty shoulders she had! But, would she believe it, one day he'd seen rather more of her than she was aware of. Yes, it was in the dining-room; she was standing on a table to wash the ceiling and he saw her through the crack of the door; her skirts were tucked up and he saw a foot, a piece of calf; yes, he'd actually seen half a yard of delicious calf. But be that as it might, he'd make her a present of a bracelet before evening, in an hour or two's time; she could depend on that. And besides, she must remember that the fur coat was hers.—

The crazy man, had he gone clean daft? Sara laughed, but she was beginning to feel half afraid of all his queer fancies. The day before yesterday he had given the washerwoman a lot more money than her bill came to; to-day he insisted on giving away his fur coat. And all sorts of stories were told of him in the town.

XX

YES, he was mad, he was mad. It must be so, for Sara offered him coffee, milk, tea, offered him beer, offered him everything she could think of, but he got up from the breakfast table as soon as he had sat down, and left the food untouched. He had suddenly remembered that it was just the time when Martha always brought her eggs to market; perhaps she was back; it would be a real piece of luck if he could see her again today of all days. He went back to his room and posted himself at the window.

The whole square was before him, but Martha was not to be seen. He waited half an hour, a whole hour, keeping a sharp look-out on every corner, but in vain. In the end his whole attention was concentrated on a scene that was taking place outside the post office and attracted a crowd of lookers-on: he saw Minutten surrounded by a circle of people, dancing and hopping up and down in the middle of the sandy street. He had no coat on and had taken off his shoes too; he danced away with a will, wiping the sweat off his face, and when he had done, he collected coppers from the spectators. So Minutten had gone back to his old line of business; he had started dancing again.

Nagel waited till he had finished and the people had cleared off; then he sent for him. And Minutten appeared, respectful as ever, with hanging head and downcast eyes.

"I have a letter for you," said Nagel. And he gave him

the letter, stuck it right down into his coat pocket, and began to talk to him. "You have put me in a very awkward position, my friend; you have sold me, made a fool of me with a slyness I can't help admiring, though it has caused me great annoyance. Have you a few minutes to spare? You remember I once promised you an explanation of something? Very well, now I'm going to give you that explanation; I feel that the moment has arrived. By the way, let me ask you first, have you heard any talk in the town about my being mad? Let me assure you, I'm not mad; you can tell that yourself, can't you? I admit that I've been a good deal upset lately; quite a lot of things have happened to me and not all of them were pleasant things—so Fate willed it. But now I'm quite well again; there's nothing wrong with me. I beg you to bear that in mind.—I suppose it's no use offering you anything?"

No, Minutten wouldn't take anything.

"I knew that.—To come to the point: I distrust you altogether, Grögaard. You probably understand very well what I'm alluding to. You've taken me in so completely that I've given up trying to put a good face on what you've done. The fact is you've imposed on me in a very serious matter, from altruistic motives entirely, from kindness of heart if you will; but still you've done it. This little bottle has been in your possession?"

Minutten gave a sidelong glance at the bottle and made no reply.

"There was poison in it; the poison has been emptied out and the bottle half filled with water; there was nothing but water in it last night."

Still Minutten said nothing.

"You see, you can't really call it a crime. The man who did it acted from sheer goodness of heart, simply to avert harm. But it was you who did it."

Pause.

"Didn't you?"

"Yes," Minutten answered at last.

"Yes. And from your point of view it was right, but from mine it bears a different complexion. Why did you do it?"

"I thought perhaps you might want to——"

Pause.

"There, you see! But you were wrong, Grögaard, your kind heart led you astray. Didn't I expressly say that night when you took away the poison that I shouldn't have the courage to drink it myself?"

"But I was afraid all the same you might do it. And now you've done it."

"I've done it? What's that you say? You're deceiving yourself, my good man. It's quite true I emptied the bottle last night, but mark me—I didn't taste the contents myself."

Minutten looked at him in surprise.

"There, you see; you've been sold! One takes a walk in the course of the night, down to the quays; one comes across a cat writhing and squirming all over the place in the most horrible agony. You stop and watch the cat; it has got something in its throat; it has swallowed a fish-hook, and it coughs and wriggles and can't get it up or down, and blood flows from its mouth. Good; you get hold of the cat and try to do something with this fish-hook; but the cat can't keep still with the pain; it rolls over on its back and makes a wild slash in the air with its claws and tears your cheek in no time—as you may see, for instance, my cheek is torn. But now the cat is on the point of suffocation and its throat is bleeding all the time. What's to be done about it? While you sit considering the question the church clock strikes two; so it's too late to get any help; it's two o'clock at night, you see.

Then you suddenly remember that you have a blessed little poison bottle in your waistcoat pocket; you want to put the animal out of pain and you empty the bottle down its throat. The animal thinks it must be some awful stuff it has swallowed; it shrinks up and stares about it with terrified eyes, and all at once it jumps sky-high; it breaks away and jumps sky-high and starts writhing again all over the quay. What then? Why, there was nothing but water in the bottle; that couldn't kill it; it could only add to its torture; and the cat is left with the fish-hook in its throat, bleeding and gasping for breath. Sooner or later it will bleed to death or creep into a corner and choke in mute horror."

"It was done with a good intention," said Minutten.

"Of course it was! Everything you do is well and honestly meant. One simply can't catch you going astray, and as far as that goes your noble and honourable swindle with my poison is nothing new. And now, for instance, when you were dancing down there in the square. I stood at the window and watched you; I'm not going to reproach you for doing it; I will only ask why you had taken your shoes off? You have shoes on now; why did you take them off to dance?"

"So as not to wear them out."

"Just what I expected! I knew that would be your answer, that's why I asked you. You're the most thoroughpaced correctness that ever walked, the most unimpeachable soul in town. Everything about you is good and unselfish; you're without stain or crease. I once tried to put you to the test and offered you payment to assume the paternity of a child that wasn't yours. Though you were poor and could have done extremely well with this money, you refused the offer promptly. Your soul revolted at the very idea of such a dirty transaction and I could do nothing with you, though I offered you as much as two hundred

crowns. Had I known what I know now, I shouldn't have offended you so grossly. I had no very clear impression of you at that time; now, however, I know that in dealing with you one has to spur on one's steed and hold him in at the same time. Well, that's all right! But let's stick to what we were talking about.—The fact that you take off your shoes and dance barefoot, without drawing people's attention to it, without minding the pain, and without complaining, that is quite characteristic of you. You don't whine; you don't say something of this sort: 'Look, I take off my shoes so as not to wear them out; I'm obliged to do that, I'm so poor!' No, you get your effects, if I may say so, mutely. It's an established principle with you never to make any appeal to anybody; you get all you want without ever opening your mouth. You are absolutely unimpeachable in your dealings both with other people and with yourself, with your own conscience. I call attention to this characteristic of yours and pass on —you mustn't be impatient; I'll explain before I've done. —You once said something about Fröken Gude which I've often thought over since; you said perhaps she was not altogether unapproachable after all if one went about it discreetly; at all events you yourself had come some way with her——"

"No, but——"

"You see, I remember it. It was that evening you and I sat here drinking; that is to say, I did the drinking and you looked on. You said that Martha—yes, you called her plain Martha and told me she always called you Johannes; isn't that right? I'm not lying, she calls you Johannes, doesn't she? You see, I remember your telling me that too. Anyhow you said that Martha had gone so far as to allow you the greatest possible liberties with her and you made a most disgusting gesture as you said it——"

Minutten jumped up, red in the face, and protested loudly: "I never said that! I never said that!"

"You never said that? What do you mean? You really never said it? What if I sent for Sara and called her to witness that she was in the next room during our talk and heard every word through the thin partition? This beats anything! Well, anyhow the whole thing's upset by your denial. I wanted to pump you a little more about this; it interested me and I've often thought about it, but if you go back on it there's no more to be said. Please sit down though; don't run for your life as you did last time. The door's locked, by the way; I locked it."

Nagel lit a cigar and suddenly changed his tone.

"Oh, but what am I saying!" he said. "Good heavens, what a mistake! Herr Grögaard, I must really ask your pardon; you're quite right, you never said it! Forget it, my dear friend; it was somebody else who said it, not you; I remember now, I heard it a week or two ago. How could I think for a single moment that you would give away a lady—give away yourself above all—like that! I can't understand what put it into my head; I must be pretty mad after all.—Look here, now: I admit it when I've made a mistake and beg pardon promptly, so I can't be mad, can I? If I nevertheless talk rather disconnectedly, rather wildly, you mustn't think I'm doing it on purpose; I'm not trying to talk you round; you mustn't think that. That would be all the more impossible, as you hardly say a word yourself. No, I talk in this queer, ill-considered way because it happens to be my humour for the moment; that's the whole reason. Excuse this digression; I dare say you're getting impatient for the explanation?"

Minutten said nothing. Nagel got up and paced excitedly up and down between the window and the door. All at once he stopped and said, sick and tired of it all:

"I really can't be bothered to keep up the game any longer; I'll tell you honestly how it is. The fact is I *have* been mystifying you with my talk, and until this moment I've done it with a purpose—to get something out of you. I've felt my way with one thing after another; nothing is any good and I'm tired of it. So now I'll give you the explanation, Grögaard. I believe in my heart you're a scoundrel in disguise. A scoundrel in disguise."

As Minutten began to tremble again and his eyes looked with anxious perplexity in every direction, Nagel proceeded: "You don't say a word; you keep to your part. I can't move you an inch; you're a mute force of a most singular kind; I admire you and I'm immensely interested in you. Do you remember that time I talked to you a whole evening, when I stared you out of countenance once or twice and made out that you gave a start? I did that to feel my way. I have kept my eye on you and tried all sorts of methods, almost always unsuccessfully, I admit, because you are an unimpeachable man. But I've never for a moment doubted that you were a quiet and pious secret sinner of some kind. I have no proof against you; I haven't been able to get that, unfortunately, so you may feel quite safe; it won't go beyond ourselves. But can you understand my being so positive when I have no proofs? There, you can't grasp that. And all the same you have a way of ducking your head when we talk of certain things; you have a particular expression of the eyes; they blink just when you say such and such words and when we approach such and such questions; and besides you have just that sort of buzz in your voice; oh, that voice! But to crown all, your person inspires me with antipathy; I feel it in the air when you come near; my soul at once gives a twitch of dislike within me. You don't understand that? Nor do I, but so it is. Upon my soul, I feel

convinced at this moment that I'm on the right track, but I can't bring it home to you because I lack proofs. Last time you were here I asked you where you were on the 6th of June—would you like to know why I asked that? Well then, the 6th of June was the day of Karlsen's death, and up to then I believed you had murdered Karlsen."

Minutten repeated in amazement: "I'd murdered Karlsen!"

"Yes, that's what I believed right up to that time. I suspected you of that; you see to what lengths my feeling that you were a scoundrel of some sort had carried me. I don't believe it any longer; I admit that I was mistaken; I went too far, and I beg your pardon. Believe me or not, it has grieved me deeply to have done you this injustice and I have begged your forgiveness many a time when I've been alone in the evening. But though I was so gravely mistaken in this instance, I am still positive that you are an unclean, oily soul—damn it, you *are!* I feel it in my bones when I look at you, and by God's holy judgment, you *are!* Why am I so sure of it? Mark what I say: in the beginning I had no reason to think other than well of you, and all you have since said and done has been right and proper—noble, I may say. Furthermore, I had an extraordinarily beautiful dream about you: I dreamt you were in the midst of a swamp, suffering horribly from my bullying, and that you thanked me through it all; you threw yourself on the ground and thanked me for not bullying you more and not hurting you more than I did. That's what I dreamt about you and it's very beautiful. And there isn't a soul in the place who thinks you capable of anything bad; they all give you the best of characters; they all sympathize with you, so well have you managed to keep things dark. And yet you are revealed to my inner eye as a cowardly, creep-

ing angel, with a good word for everybody and a good deed every day. What then; have you talked scandal about me, made mischief for me, revealed my secrets? No, no, you have not; and that's just part of your insinuating way; you give every man his due, you never do anything you shouldn't, you are pious and unimpeachable and innocent in the eyes of all men. And that is enough for the world, but it's not enough for me; my suspicions are still awake. The first time I saw you a curious thing happened to me. It was a day or two after I'd arrived, one night at two o'clock. I saw you outside Martha Gude's cottage down by the quay; you suddenly appeared in the middle of the street without my seeing where you came from; you waited and let me pass you, and, as I went by, you gave me a sidelong look. That was before I'd spoken to you; but a voice within me called my attention to you, and the voice said your name was Johannes. If it's the last word I'm ever to speak, there was a voice singing in my heart that your name was Johannes and that I was to take note of you. I only heard long afterwards that it was right about your name; but from that night I have had my attention turned on you and you have always given me the slip; I have never been able to get you into a corner. And at last you go and adulterate a mouthful of poison for me, fearing in your good and noble way that I might possibly want to drink it. How shall I explain the way I feel about all this? Your virtue brutalizes me; all your fair words and acts simply take me farther from my goal, which is to bring you down. I want to pluck the mask from you and make you show yourself in your true colours; my blood curdles with antipathy every time I see your lying, blue eyes; I shrink at the sight of you and feel that you're an impostor in your very soul. Even at this moment I believe I can see that you're laughing inwardly, that in spite of your

crushed and despairing look you're enjoying a secret, swinish laugh over my not being able to get at you for want of proofs."

And even now Minutten did not say a word. Nagel went on: "Of course you think me a brutal bully for throwing these accusations in your face? That's all right, I don't worry about that; think whatever you like of me. You know in your soul at this moment that I've hit you off, and that's enough for me. But how is it you stand my treating you like this? Why don't you get up, spit in my face, and clear out?"

Minutten seemed to recover himself; he looked up and said: "You've locked the door."

"There now," replied Nagel, "you're waking up! And you want to persuade me you believe the door is locked? The door's open; look here, now it's wide open! I told you it was locked to test you; it was a trap I laid for you. The fact is, you knew all the time that the door was open, but you pretended you didn't know it so that you might sit here virtuous and innocent as ever and let me heap injuries on you. You didn't leave the room; no, you didn't move. As soon as I hinted that I suspected you of something, you pricked up your ears; you wanted to hear how much I knew, how dangerous I might be. Upon my soul, that's how it is; you can deny it as much as you like, it's all the same to me. And why am I bringing you to book in this way? You may reasonably ask that question; it may seem none of my business. My friend, it *is* my business; in the first place I should like to give you a word of warning. Believe me, I'm speaking quite sincerely at this moment. You are leading some kind of scoundrelly life on the quiet, and that can't go on for ever. One fine day you will be exposed to the world and anybody may trample on you. That's that. In the second place, something tells me that in spite of your denials Fröken Gude

is more to you than you care to have known. Well, how does Fröken Gude concern me? You're right again. To a question of that sort I have no answer; Fröken Gude concerns me less than anybody else. But on purely general grounds I may permit myself to be grieved if you associate with her and possibly infect her with your saintly depravity. That is why I have brought you to book."

Nagel relighted his cigar and said: "And now I've finished and the door isn't locked. Can you say you've been molested? Answer or not, as you please; but if you answer, let your inner voice speak for you. Dear friend, let me add this before you go: I wish you no harm."

Pause.

Minutten got up, put his hand in his coat pocket, and brought out the letter, saying: "I can't accept this now."

Nagel had not expected this; he had forgotten all about the letter.

"You won't accept it?" he said. "Why not?"

"I can't accept it."

Minutten put the letter on the table and made for the door. Nagel followed him with the letter in his hand; his eyes were moist and his voice shook .

"Take it, Grögaard; take it all the same," he said.

"No!" replied Minutten. And he opened the door.

Nagel pushed the door to and said once more: "Take it, take it! I'd rather let it be said that I'm mad, that you mustn't remember anything I've said to-day. I am very mad; don't take any notice of all the drivel I've been talking for the last hour. You see, don't you, I'm not to be believed if I'm out of my senses? But take the letter; I wish you no harm, though I'm far from myself. Take it for God's sake, there isn't much in it, believe me, only a little, and I wanted to give you a letter in the end; I've thought of doing so all the time; I thought I'd give you a letter with hardly anything in it, so long

as it was a letter. It's only a greeting. There now, I'm sincerely grateful to you."

So saying he thrust the letter into Minutten's hand and ran to the window to avoid having to take it back. Minutten did not give in; he put the letter on the table again and shook his head.

He left.

XXI

NO, everything was taking a bad turn. Whether he stayed indoors or roamed about the streets, he found no peace; he had a thousand things in his head and each thing brought its own particular bit of torment. Why was everything going against him? He couldn't understand it; but the threads were winding ever closer about him. It had gone so far that he actually hadn't been able to persuade Minutten to accept a little letter he wanted to give him.

Everything was gloomy and impossible. And to add to his torments he was beginning to feel a nervous dread of something, as though a mysterious danger were lying in wait for him. He often started in vague terror if the window curtains merely fluttered a little. What new troubles were threatening? His rather hard features, which had never been handsome, were made even less attractive by the dark stubble that showed on his chin and cheeks. And it seemed to him that his hair had turned a little greyer over the ears.

Well, what then? Wasn't the sun shining and wasn't he happy to be still alive and able to go where he liked? Was any glory denied him? The sunshine lay upon the square and upon the sea; the birds were singing in the charming little gardens in front of every house and hopped continually from twig to twig; all was a flood of golden sunshine; the gravel of the roads was bathed in it and the silver ball on the top of the church spire sparkled in the sky like an immense diamond.

He passed into a mood of joyful exaltation, of such

ungovernable rapture that on the spur of the moment he leaned out of his window and scattered a lot of silver coins among some children who were playing by the hotel steps.

"Now be good, children!" he said, and he could hardly utter the words for emotion. What had he to be afraid of? He didn't look worse than usual either; besides, what was to stop his getting a shave and a brush-up? He was his own master. And he went to the barber's.

At the same time he remembered some things he had to buy, and he must take care not to forget that bracelet he had promised Sara. Cheerfully humming, he went about his shopping, carefree and contented as a child with all the world. It was only a delusion that he had something to fear.

His good spirits persisted and he lost himself in cheerful thoughts. Just now he had had a sharp scene with Minutten, and it was already half effaced from his memory; he only remembered it as a dream. Minutten had refused to accept his letter; but hadn't he another letter, for Martha? In his craving to share his exuberant joy with others he cast about for a means of getting this letter delivered. How should he manage it? He looked in his wallet and found the letter. It wouldn't do to send it privately to Dagny? No, he couldn't send it to Dagny. He thought again: the letter must be sent off at all costs; it contained a couple of bank-notes, no writing, not a word; perhaps he could ask Dr. Stenersen to take charge of it? And, pleased with the idea, he went to Dr. Stenersen's.

It was six o'clock.

He knocked at the surgery door; it was closed. He was going in the back way, thinking to inquire in the kitchen, when Fru Stenersen called to him from the garden.

They were sitting at a big stone table drinking coffee,

a large party, ladies and gentlemen; Dagny Kielland was among them, wearing a white hat trimmed with light-coloured little flowers.

Nagel would have liked to get away; he stammered: "The Doctor—it was the Doctor——"

Heavens, was he ill?

No, no, he wasn't ill.

Well, then he must stay.

And Fru Stenersen laid hold of his arm. Dagny actually got up and offered him her chair. He looked at her; they looked at each other. She had actually got up; she had said in a low voice: "Won't you take this chair?"

But he found a place by the side of the Doctor and sat down.

This reception scattered his wits a little. Dagny looked at him kindly and had positively offered him her chair. His heart was beating violently; perhaps he could give her Martha's letter after all?

But in a little while he recovered his composure. These people's lively small talk did him good; his cheerful mood took hold of him again and made his voice quiver. For he was alive; he was not dead and not going to die. Here in this green and leafy garden, around a table with spotless cloth and shining silver, sat a merry party, with laughing lips and sparkling eyes; what excuse was there for feeling dismal?

"If you wanted to be really nice you'd get your violin and play to us," said the Doctor's wife.

How could she think of such a thing!

When the others backed her up, he laughed aloud and said: "But I don't even possess a violin!"

But they would send for the organist's violin; it wouldn't take a minute.

No, it was no good; he wouldn't touch it. And be-

sides, the organist's violin was spoilt by those little rubies let into the finger-board; they gave it a glassy tone; they ought never to have been put there; it was unbearable. Anyhow he'd lost the art—well, for that matter he never had it; he must be the best judge of that, mustn't he?—And then he gave them an account of the first and last time his playing had received public mention; it was almost symbolic. He had got the paper in the evening and relished it in bed; he was very young then; he was living at home and it was a local paper that reported him. Oh, how happy that paper made him! He read it many times over and fell asleep with the candles alight. Later on he woke up, still dead tired; the candles had burnt out; the room was in darkness, but he had a glimpse of something white on the floor, and, as he knew there was a white spittoon in the room, he thought to himself: "You'll see, that's the spittoon." With shame be it spoken—he spat, and heard that he'd made a good shot. And as he was so successful the first time, he spat again and made another good shot. Then he turned over and went to sleep. But in the morning he discovered that it was the precious paper he'd used as a spittoon; he had spat upon the very friendly expression of public opinion. It was most distressing!

They all laughed at this, and the party grew livelier and livelier, till Fru Stenersen remarked: "But you're looking rather paler than usual?"

"Ah," replied Nagel, "that's of no consequence; there's nothing wrong with me."—And he laughed aloud at the idea of there being anything wrong with him.

All at once a flush came over his cheeks; he rose from the seat and said there was something wrong with him all the same. He couldn't make it out; it was as though something unexpected was coming; he felt a little afraid. Had they ever heard anything like it? It was ridiculous

and couldn't mean anything, could it? As a matter of fact, something had happened to him.

Then they begged him to tell them what it was.

No, why should he? It was of no consequence, it was silly; why should he take up their time with it? Besides, it would probably bore them.

But it wouldn't bore them at all.

Well, but it was so long. It began right over in San Francisco, one time when he was smoking opium.—

"Opium? My, how amusing!"

"No, Fru Stenersen, I should call it rather harrowing, seeing that here I am in broad daylight, haunted by vague fears. You mustn't think I make a habit of smoking opium; I've smoked it only twice, and the second time is of no interest. But the first time I had a really curious experience, there's no doubt about that. I found myself in a den. How did I come there? Quite by chance. I have a way sometimes of strolling about the streets, looking at people, and I choose some particular person and follow him at a distance to see what becomes of him in the end. I don't shrink from going right into the house and upstairs to see what becomes of him. At night in great cities it's extraordinarily interesting and may lead one into the most curious acquaintances. Well, that's not my story. As I was saying, I was in San Francisco, strolling about the streets. It was night; there was a tall, thin woman walking in front of me and I was keeping an eye on her; in the light of the gas-lamps I could see that she wore thin clothes, but she had a cross of green stones hanging round her neck. Where was she making for? She passed several blocks, turned corners, walked on and on, and I was always at her heels. At last we found ourselves in the Chinese quarter; the woman dived into an underground passage and I followed; she walked through a long corridor and I did the same. On our

right hand was a wall, on our left were cafés, barbers' shops, and laundries. The woman stopped at a door, knocked, a face with slanting eyes looked through a peephole in the door, and the woman was admitted. I waited a little while, keeping very quiet, and then I knocked too; the door opened again and I was admitted.

"The room was full of smoke and loud-voiced conversation. Over at the counter was the thin woman, disputing with a Chinaman in a blue shirt, which hung outside his trousers. I went a little nearer and heard that she was trying to pawn her cross, but didn't want to hand it over; she proposed to keep it herself. It was a matter of two dollars and she owed something already, which made it three dollars in all. Good; she carried on a bit, cried now and then and wrung her hands, and I thought her very interesting. The Chinaman in the shirt was interesting too; he wouldn't do any business unless the cross was handed over; money or a pledge!

" 'I'll sit here and wait a little,' said the woman; 'and I guess I'll end by doing it; I'll agree to it at last. But I ought not to do it!'—And then she sobbed right in the Chinaman's face and wrung her hands.

" 'What is it you ought not to do?' I asked.

"But she heard I was a foreigner and didn't answer.

"She was extraordinarily interesting and I decided to do something. I would lend her this money to see how it would turn out. I did it only from curiosity and I slipped another dollar into her hand to see what use she would make of it. I thought it would be very amusing to see.

"She stared at me and thanked me, didn't say anything, but nodded several times and looked at me with tears in her eyes—and I had only done it out of curiosity. Good; she paid at the counter and asked for a room. She had handed over all her money.

"She went out and I followed. We walked through another long corridor with numbered rooms on each side, and the woman slipped into one of these rooms and slammed the door. I waited a while; she didn't come back, didn't come back. I tried the door; it was locked.

"Then I went into the next room, prepared to wait. There was a red settee and an electric bell; the room was lighted by a lamp let into the wall. I lay on the settee, found the time long and was bored. For the sake of doing something I pressed the bell. I didn't want anything, but I rang.

"A Chinese boy came, looked at me, and disappeared again. A few minutes passed. "Come, let me have another look at you!' I said to pass the time; 'why don't you come back?' And I rang again.

"Then the boy came back, noiselessly, like a spirit, gliding on felt slippers. He said nothing, I said nothing either; but he handed me a tiny porcelain pipe with a long, thin stem and I took it from him. Then he held a piece of glowing charcoal to it and I smoked. I hadn't asked for the pipe, but I smoked. Soon after, my ears began to buzz.—

"Then I remember nothing until I felt I was somewhere on high; I began to rise, I was soaring. All around me was indescribably bright, and the clouds I saw were white. Who was I, and where was I flying? I tried to think and could remember nothing, but I was gliding at a wonderful height. I saw green fields in the distance, blue lakes, valleys and mountains in golden light; I heard music from the stars, and the space around me swayed up and down with melodies. But the white clouds did me more good than anything; they floated right through me and gave me a feeling that I should die of the glory of it. This went on and on; I had no idea of time and had forgotten who I was. Then an earthly memory

flickered through my heart, and at once I began to sink.

"I sank and sank; the light faded; it grew darker and darker around me; I saw the earth beneath me and knew where I was again; there were towns; there was wind and smoke. Then I came to a halt; I looked about, and I was surrounded by sea. My happy feeling was gone; I hurt myself against rocks and felt cold. There was a white sandy bottom under my feet, and above me I saw nothing but water. I swam a few strokes and reached a coral reef. There were no corals left, the reef had been plundered, and I said to myself: 'Somebody has been here before!' And I no longer felt so lonely, since somebody had been there before. I started swimming again to try and come ashore, but this time I took only a stroke or two and then stopped. What stopped me was a body lying on the bottom right in front of me; it was a woman, a tall, thin woman, and she lay on a rock, badly mangled. I turned her over and saw that I knew her; but she was dead and I couldn't understand how she came to be dead, as I knew her by the cross with the green stones. It was the same woman I had just been following through the long corridor with the numbered rooms. I wanted to swim away, but I stopped to put her straight; she was lying promiscuously on a great rock, and that made an uncanny impression on me. Her eyes were wide open, but I dragged her to a sandy spot, and I saw the cross on her throat and tucked it under her dress so that the fishes might not take it from her. Then I swam away.—

"But in the morning they told me the woman had died during the night. She had jumped into the sea outside the Chinese quarter; they found her in the morning. It was a very singular thing; but she was dead. Perhaps I could see her once more if I tried, I thought. And I smoked opium again to see if I could find her; but I did not find her.

"Wasn't that strange? But I had another adventure later on. I had returned to Europe; I was at home. One warm night I was strolling about and came down to the harbour, to the dredgers, where I stayed a good while listening to the talk on board the ships. It was quite still; the dredgers were not working. At last I got tired, but didn't want to go home because it was so warm. I climbed into the framework of one of the dredgers and sat down there. But the night was so still and warm, I couldn't keep awake; I fell sound asleep.

"Then I was awakened by a voice calling me; I looked down; a woman was standing below. She was tall and thin; in the flicker of the gas-lamp I could see that her clothes were very thin.

"I bowed.

"'It's raining,' she said.

"Good; I didn't know it was raining, but if so, it was best to seek shelter. I climbed down from the framework. At that moment the dredgers began to clank; a hopper swung up and disappeared; another swung up and disappeared; the dredgers were working. But if I hadn't got away in time, I should have been smashed, torn to pieces. I saw that at once.

"I looked around; sure enough, it was beginning to rain a little; the woman was walking away; I saw her in front of me and knew her perfectly; she was still wearing the cross. I had known her all along, but would not admit it. Now I wanted to catch her and walked as fast as I could; but I did not catch her. She did not touch the ground, she was gliding along without moving her feet; she turned a corner and vanished.

"That was four years ago."

Nagel stopped. The Doctor seemed inclined to laugh, but said as seriously as he could: "And since then you haven't met her?"

"Yes, I saw her again to-day. That's what gives me an uneasy feeling off and on. I stood at the window of my room looking out and she came straight towards me, right across the square, as though coming from the quays and the sea; she stopped opposite my windows and looked up. I could not be sure that her glance was meant for me, so I moved to another window; but she turned her eyes and looked at me there again. Then I made her a bow; but, on seeing that, she turned abruptly and floated back across the square to the quays. The puppy Jakobsen bristled up and dashed wildly out of the hotel barking. This made some impression on me. I had almost forgotten her after all this time, and now she's appeared again to-day. Perhaps she wanted to give me a warning."

Then the Doctor burst out laughing.

"Yes," he said; "she wanted to warn you against coming to see us."

"Well, of course she's made a mistake this time and there's nothing to be afraid of. But last time there were the dredgers, which would have torn me to pieces. And I've been feeling rather uneasy. But you don't think it means anything, do you? It would be a nice business to find oneself let in for I don't know what! I can't help laughing at it all."

"Superstition and nerves!" said the Doctor curtly.

But then the others started telling stories of their own, and the clock struck again and again; it was getting on towards evening. Nagel sat in silence the whole time; he was feeling chilly. At last he got up to go. He couldn't very well bother Dagny with that letter; it would have to wait; perhaps he could see the Doctor next day and give it him then. His happy mood was entirely gone.

To his great surprise Dagny also got up as he was on the point of leaving; she said: "Well, you're all telling such a lot of uncanny stories that I'm feeling quite ter-

rified. I must see about getting home before it's any darker."

And they left the garden together. Nagel was flushed with delight; ah, now he could give her the letter! He would never have a better chance.

"Was there something you had to see me about?" the Doctor called after him.

"No, nothing really," he replied in some confusion. "I just thought I'd call and—— It was so long since I'd seen you. Good-evening."

As they went down the street they were both ill at ease; Dagny too was ill at ease. She could only talk about the weather; how mild it was this evening!

"Yes, calm and mild!"

He couldn't find anything to say either; he looked up at her as they went along. She had the same velvet eyes and the same fair plait of hair down her back; all his tender feelings were reawakened; her presence so close to him was intoxicating and he passed his hand over his eyes. She grew lovelier and lovelier every time he saw her, every time! He forgot all, forgot her scorn, forgot her hiding Martha from him and tempting him mercilessly with a handkerchief. He had to turn away for fear he might yield to another passionate outburst. No, now he must hold up his head; he'd driven her to extremities twice already; he must be a man! And he held his breath and hardened his heart.

They had reached the main street; the hotel was on the right. She looked as if she would say something. He walked in silence by her side. Perhaps he would have a chance of seeing her through the wood? All at once she looked at him and said: "Thanks for your story. Are you anxious now? You mustn't be!"

Ah yes, she was gentle and kind to-day; he would mention the letter at once.

"I should like to ask a favour of you," he said. "But I hardly dare; I don't suppose you would do me a favour now?"

"Oh yes, I'll be even glad to," she replied.

She'd be glad to! He took out the letter.

"I want to ask you to deliver this letter. It's only a few lines—nothing important, but—— It's for Fröken Gude. Perhaps you know where Fröken Gude is? She's gone away."

Dagny stopped. A strangely veiled look came over her blue eyes; she stood for a moment perfectly motionless.

"For Fröken Gude?" she said.

"Yes. If you'll be so kind? Perhaps it could wait, there's no hurry——"

"Yes, yes!" she said all at once; "give it me; certainly I'll take charge of a letter from you to Fröken Gude." —And when she had put the letter in her pocket she nodded abruptly and said: "Well, well, thanks for your company. I must go now."

With that she gave him another look and went.

He found himself alone. Why had she broken off so sharply? Yet she didn't look angry with him; on the contrary. And yet she had left him so suddenly! Now she was turning into the parsonage road—and now she was gone.—

When he could see her no longer, he went into the hotel. She had been wearing a snow-white hat. And she had looked at him so strangely.—

XXII

WHAT a veiled look she had given him! He didn't understand it. But next time he met her he would put it right again if he had offended her once more. How heavy his head was feeling! But he had nothing at all to be anxious about; so much was certain, thank God.

He sat down on the sofa and began to turn over a book, but did not read. He got up uneasily and went to the window. Without admitting it to himself, he hardly dared look into the street for fear his eyes might again encounter an unusual sight. His knees began to quake; what was the matter with him? He moved back to the sofa and let the book drop on the floor. His head was hammering; he felt positively ill. There was no doubt he was feverish; the two nights of exposure in the woods had taken effect at last and gone right through him. He had already felt a chill as he sat in the Doctor's garden.

Well, it would pass off. He was not in the habit of giving in to a trifling cold; to-morrow he would be as well as ever. He rang and had brandy sent up; but the brandy had no effect on him, didn't even intoxicate him, and he drank several big glasses in vain. The worst of it was that his head was going wrong; he couldn't think clearly.

How quickly the attack had come on, in the course of an hour! What was that? why were the curtains fluttering so wildly when there was no wind? Did it mean anything? He got up again and went to the looking-

glass; he looked distracted and ill. Yes, his hair had turned greyer and his eyes were rimmed with red.— Are you anxious still? you mustn't be. Lovely Dagny! Think of it, a perfectly white hat.—

There was a knock at his door and the landlord came in. He brought Nagel's bill at last, a long bill on two sheets. However, the landlord was smiling and extremely polite.

Nagel took out his wallet at once and began to rummage in it, but as he did so, shaking with apprehension, he asked how much it came to, and the other told him. But it could quite well wait till to-morrow or another day; there was no hurry.

Well, what if he couldn't pay? perhaps he couldn't. And Nagel found no money. What, hadn't he any money? He flung the wallet on the table and started turning out his pockets; he was at his wit's end and searched miserably everywhere; at last he even went through his trouser pockets and produced some small change, saying: "I have some money here, but I don't suppose it's enough; no, it can't be enough; count it yourself."

"No," the landlord agreed; "it's not enough."

The perspiration broke out on Nagel's forehead; he wanted to give the landlord these few crowns to go on with and he searched his waistcoat pockets to see if he had any more change. And there was none. But surely he could borrow a little; perhaps someone would lend him a little as a favour! Who could tell if he wouldn't get help if he asked?

The landlord no longer looked pleased; even his politeness forsook him and he took up Nagel's wallet, which was still lying on the table, and examined it for himself.

"All right, go ahead!" said Nagel. "You can see for yourself there's nothing but papers. I can't make it out."

But the landlord opened the middle pocket and dropped the wallet like a shot; his face was one great smile of surprise.

"There it is!" he said. "Thousands! So you were joking; you wanted to see if I understood a joke?"

Nagel adopted this explanation, happy as a child. With a delightful breath of relief he said: "Yes, that was it; I was only joking; I thought I'd have a little game with you. Yes, thank God, I have plenty of money left; look here, just look here!"

And in fact there were many big notes, a lot of money in thousand-crown notes; the landlord had to go out and get change before he could pay himself. But long after he had gone, the perspiration still stood on Nagel's forehead and he was shaking with agitation. How it had upset him and what a hollow roar there was inside his head!

A little while after, he fell into an uneasy doze on the sofa, dreaming and tossing about, talking aloud, singing, calling for brandy, which he drank half asleep and full of fever. Sara was constantly in and out, and though he talked to her nearly all the time, she understood very little of what he said.

No, he wouldn't undress; what was she thinking of? Wasn't it the middle of the day? He could hear the birds singing quite plainly. She was not to fetch the Doctor either. No, the Doctor would only give him a yellow ointment and a white ointment, and then they'd make an egregious mistake with these ointments and give him the wrong one and kill him on the spot. That was how Karlsen was killed; she remembered Karlsen? Yes, he died of that. However that might be, Karlsen had got a fishhook in his throat, and when the Doctor came with his medicines it turned out that it was only a glass of ordinary baptismal spring water that choked him. He he he

—though it was not a thing to laugh at.—"Look here, Sara, you mustn't think I'm drunk. Association of ideas —do you hear that? Encyclopædists and all the rest of it. Count your buttons, Sara, and see if I'm drunk.—Listen, now the mills are working, the town mills! Lord, what a god-forsaken hole you live in, Sara; I should like to deliver you out of the hands of your enemies, as the scripture says. Go to hell, go to hell! Who are you anyhow? You're false, every one of you, and I'm going to bring every one of you to book. You don't believe it? Oh, what an eye I've kept on you! I'm convinced that Lieutenant Hansen has promised Minutten two flannel shirts, but do you think he has got them? And do you think Minutten dare admit it? Let me pluck you out of that delusion; Minutten *daren't* admit it, he wriggles away; do you get me? If I'm not mistaken, Herr Grögaard, you're laughing again like a swine behind your newspaper. You're not? Well, it's all the same to me.—Are you still here, Sara? Good! If you'll sit here for five minutes more, I'll tell you a story; is that a bargain? But first you must imagine a man whose eyebrows are falling off little by little. Have you got that clear in your head? Whose eyebrows are falling off. Next, may I be permitted to ask whether you've ever slept in a bed that creaked? Count your buttons and see if you have. I strongly suspect you. For that matter I've had a suspicious eye on all the people of this town. For that matter. And I've done my job well; I've given you a score of extraordinarily fruitful topics of conversation and upset the regularity of your lives; I've got up one turbulent scene after another in your respectable hole-and-corner existence. Ho-ho, what a roar the mills are making, what a roar! Whereupon I counsel you, respected spinster Sara Taproom Josefsdatter, to eat clear soup while it's hot, for if you let it get

cold, damn me if there's anything left but water.—More brandy, Sara, I've a pain in my head, in both sides of my head and right up the middle. Quite odd how it hurts.—"

"Won't you have something warm?" asked Sara.

Something warm? What was she thinking of all the time? It would be all over the town in an instant that he'd drunk something warm. She must remember that he had no intention of making a scandal; he would behave like a good ratepayer, take the regulation walk on the parsonage road, and never be so hapless as to view things differently from other people; his oath upon it, three fingers in the air.—She needn't be afraid. He really had some pain here and there; but that was why he wouldn't undress; it would pass off quicker. You had to meet force with force.—

He got worse and worse, and Sara sat on thorns. She would have liked to escape, but he noticed at once if she got up, and asked if she meant to desert him. She was waiting for him to go off to sleep when he had talked himself tired. Oh, how he babbled, still with his eyes shut and his face flushed with heat and fever. He had thought out a new way of clearing Fru Stenersen's currant bushes of lice. The idea was that he would go into a shop one day and buy a can of kerosene, after which he would appear in the square, take his shoes off, and fill them with kerosene. Then he set fire to them both, one shoe after the other, and finally he danced round them in his stocking-feet and sang a song. This was to come off one morning when he was well again. He would make a regular circus of it, a real horse-opera, and he'd have a whip to crack.

Another idea he worked at was finding odd and ridiculous names and titles for his acquaintances. For instance, he called Deputy Reinert Bilge and made out that Bilge was a title. "Herr Reinert, worshipful Town Bilge," he said. But at last he began to drivel about the

height of the rooms in Consul Andresen's house. "Seven feet, seven feet!" he cried time after time. "Seven feet at a guess; am I not right?" But speaking seriously, he'd really got a fish-hook in his throat, he wasn't shamming, and it made him bleed; it gave him a good deal of pain.—

At last towards evening he went properly off to sleep.

He woke again about ten. He was alone and still lying on the sofa. A blanket Sara had spread over him had slipped to the floor, but he was not cold. Sara had also shut the windows and he opened them again. He imagined his head was clear; but he felt faint and was trembling. The vague terror seized him again; he felt it in his very marrow if anything creaked or a shout came from the street. Perhaps if he went to bed and slept till morning it would pass off. And he undressed.

However, he could not get off to sleep. He lay thinking over all he had gone through in the last twenty-four hours, from the night when he went into the woods and emptied the little bottle of water till now, when he lay in his room fairly done up and tormented by fever. What a long day it had been! And his fear would not leave him; that vague, mysterious feeling that he was approaching a danger, a disaster, never let him go. What had he done? What a whispering there was around his bed! The room was full of whispering murmurs. He clasped his hands and thought he went to sleep.—

Suddenly he looked at his fingers and saw that his ring was missing. Instantly his heart began to beat faster; he looked more closely; there was a faint dark line around his finger, but no ring! God in heaven, the ring was gone; yes, he'd thrown it into the sea; he thought he wouldn't want it any more, as he was going to die, so he threw it into the sea. But now it was gone, the ring was gone!

He jumped out of bed again, pulled on some clothes, and dashed about the room like a lunatic. It was ten o'clock; before twelve the ring must be found; on the stroke of twelve was the last second, the ring, the ring——

He rushed downstairs, out into the street, and made for the quays. They had seen him from the hotel, but he didn't mind that. He was growing faint again, his knees gave way under him, but he didn't notice that either. Ah, now he knew the reason of the dull anxiety that had weighed on him all day; the iron ring was gone! And the woman with the cross had appeared to him.

Beside himself with terror, he jumped into the first boat he found alongside. It was made fast to the quay and he could not cast it off. He called to a man and asked him to cast off the boat, but the man replied that he dared not; it was not his boat.—Ah, but Nagel would take it all upon himself; the ring must be found; he'd buy the boat.—But couldn't he see the boat was padlocked. Couldn't he see the chain?—Oh, all right, then he'd take another boat.

And Nagel jumped across into another boat.

"Where do you want to go?" asked the man.

"I'm looking for the ring. I dare say you know me; I had a ring here, you can see the mark of it, I'm not telling you lies. And now I've thrown the ring away; it's lying out there somewhere."

The man didn't understand this sort of talk.

"Are you going to look for a ring at the bottom of the sea?" he asked.

"That's it!" replied Nagel. "I see you understand. I must have my ring; you can see that for yourself. Come and row me."

The man asked again: "Are you going to look for a finger-ring that you've thrown into the sea?"

"Yes, yes, come on! I'll give you plenty of money."

"Bless your soul, let it alone! Are you going to pick it up with your fingers?"

"Yes, with my fingers; it's all the same to me. I can swim like an eel as far as that goes. Perhaps we can find something else to pick it up with instead of fingers."

And the strange man actually got into the boat. He sat down to talk the matter over, but kept his face averted. It was sheer folly to try such a thing. Now, if it had been an anchor or a chain-cable there would be some sense in it; but a finger-ring! And he didn't even know the exact spot!

And Nagel himself began to see what a hopeless errand he was on. But he couldn't grasp the idea; it meant that he was lost! His eyes grew stiff and he trembled with fever and fear. He made as though to jump overboard and the man held him fast; Nagel collapsed at once; he was faint, tired out, far too weak to wrestle with anyone. God in heaven, what was he coming to! The ring was lost; it would soon be twelve o'clock and the ring was lost! And he had had the warning.

At that moment a gleam of clear consciousness lighted up his brain and he thought of an incredible number of things in the brief space of two or three minutes. He remembered a thing that had escaped him hitherto, how that the evening before he had written a farewell to his sister and put the letter in the post. He was not dead yet, but the letter was gone; it couldn't be stopped, it would have to take its course, and it was already far on the way. And when his sister received it, he must definitely be dead. Besides, the ring was gone; everything was impossible now.—

His teeth were chattering; he looked about him and could not make up his mind; it was only a short jump into the sea. He stole a glance at the man on the thwart before him; the man still kept his face averted, but he was

watching; he was actually ready to take hold of him if necessary. But why did he keep his face turned away?

"Let me help you ashore," said the man. And he took him under the arms and brought him ashore.

"Good-night," said Nagel, turning his back on him.

But the man followed him suspiciously, secretly keeping an eye on all his movements. Nagel turned again furiously and said good-night once more; then he tried to jump off the quay.

And the man caught hold of him again.

"It won't work," he said close to Nagel's ear. "You swim too well; you'll come up again."

Nagel gave a start and reflected. Yes, he swam too well; perhaps he'd come up again and save himself. He looked at the man, stared him in the face; a hideous mask grinned back at him—it was Minutten.

Minutten again, always Minutten.

"To hell with you, you vile, crawling snake!" shrieked Nagel, setting off at a run. He reeled along the street like a drunken man, stumbled, fell, and picked himself up again; everything was dancing round and he kept on running, making for the town. So Minutten had crossed his plans for the second time! In Heaven's name, what would he think of next? How everything danced before his eyes! What a roar there was over the town. He fell again.

He got on to his knees and rocked his head painfully to and fro. Listen, there was a cry from the sea! It would soon be twelve o'clock and the ring was not found. And a being was coming after him; he could hear the sound of it, a scaly beast with gaunt belly that trailed along the ground and left a wet track, a horrible hieroglyph with arms growing out of its head and a yellow claw on its nose. Away, away! There again was

the cry from the sea; with a shriek he put his hands to his ears to keep it out.

And again he jumped to his feet. All hope was not gone yet; there was still the last resource, a safe six-shooter, the best thing in the world! And he wept with gratitude, ran as fast as he could and wept with gratitude for this new hope. Suddenly he remembered that it was night; he could get no six-shooter, all the shops were shut. And then he gave up altogether and sank forward with his forehead on the ground without uttering a sound.

At that moment the landlord and one or two others came out to see what had become of him.—

Then he woke up and looked about him—he had dreamt the whole thing. Yes, he had been asleep after all. Thank God, it was all a dream; he had never been out of bed.

He lay for a while thinking it over. He looked at his hand, but the ring was gone; he looked at his watch; it was midnight, it was twelve o'clock, only a few minutes to twelve. Perhaps he would get out of it all; perhaps he would be saved in the end! But his heart was throbbing violently and he was shaking all over. Perhaps, perhaps twelve o'clock might come without anything happening? He took the watch in his hand, and his hand was shaking; he counted the minutes, the seconds——

The watch fell to the floor and he leapt out of bed. "The cry!" he whispered, and he looked out of window with bursting eyes. In a second he threw on some clothes, flung the door open, and dashed into the street. He looked around; nobody was watching him. Then he made for the harbour at a run, the back of his waistcoat showing white as he ran. He was down at the quays, ran on to the farthest pier, and jumped straight into the sea.

Some bubbles came up.

XXIII

LATE one night in the following April Dagny and Martha were walking together through the town; they had come from a party and were on their way home. It was dark and there was ice on the road, which made them go very slowly.

"I'm thinking," said Dagny, "of all the things that were said about Nagel this evening. A good deal of it was new to me."

"I didn't hear it," replied Martha; "I went out."

"But there was one thing they didn't know," Dagny went on. "Nagel said to me all those months ago that Minutten would come to a bad end. I can't make out how he saw it even then. He said it long, long before you told me what Minutten had done to you."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

They had entered the parsonage road. The wood lay dark and still about them, no sound was to be heard but their footsteps on the frozen road.

After a long silence Dagny said again: "This was the walk he always took."

"Who?" said Martha. "It's slippery, won't you take my arm?"

"All right; but you'd better take mine."

And they walked on in silence, arm in arm, holding each other closely.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

The type in which this book has been set (on the Linotype) is Old Style No. 1. In design, the face is of English origin, by MacKellar, Smith and Jordan, and bears the workmanlike quality and freedom from "frills" characteristic of English old styles in the period prior to the introduction of the "modern" letter. It gives an evenly textured page that may be read with a minimum of fatigue. Old Style No. 1 was one of the first faces designed and cut by the Linotype Company, and it is still one of the most popular.

SET UP, ELECTROTYPED AND PRINTED BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y. · PAPER MANUFACTURED BY W. C. HAMILTON & SONS, MIQUON, PA., AND FURNISHED BY W. F. ETHERINGTON & CO., NEW YORK · BOUND BY H. WOLFF ESTATE NEW YORK.

ALSO BY
KNUT HAMSUN

PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF
FOR SALE AT ALL BOOK SHOPS

HUNGER

TRANSLATED BY GEORGE EGERTON

"In *Hunger,*" says The New York Evening Mail in a leading editorial, "Knut Hamsun has recorded the privations, the longings, the stirrings, the disappointments and the aspirations that make up the lives of the vast masses of men and women in America and throughout the world."

SEGELFOSS TOWN

TRANSLATED BY J. S. SCOTT

"Each detail of that vast canvas is drawn with a minutely scrupulous brush, and most of them are humorous in one way or another. In this Hamsun's true greatness lies—as a painter of human character."

—*Edwin Björkman*

GROWTH OF THE SOIL

TRANSLATED BY W. W. WORSTER

"I do not know how to express the admiration I feel for this wonderful book without seeming to

be extravagant. I am not usually lavish with my praise, but indeed the book impresses me as among the very greatest novels I have ever read. It is wholly beautiful; it is saturated with wisdom and humor and tenderness."

—H. G. Wells.

CHILDREN OF THE AGE

TRANSLATED BY J. S. SCOTT

"Leaving the moral of the tale aside, it is magnificently done and is a perfect whole. The power of imagination and the subtlety of the character-drawing make it easy to forget Hamsun the moralist and Hamsun the unconscious aesthete."

—J. W. Krutch in The Nation.

VICTORIA

TRANSLATED BY A. G. CHATER

"*Victoria* is delicate, finely done, of an exquisite simplicity. There is vividness, and there is passion, but always the idyllic quality is unfalteringly maintained."

—The New York Times.

BENONI

TRANSLATED BY A. G. CHATER

"Those who know *Growth of the Soil* for the very great novel it is will not be displeased to come upon Hamsun in the full fettle of comic spirit. Rather they will increase their pleasure

in having shared again in the speech and emotions of his people."

—Laurence Stallings in The New York World.

ROSA

TRANSLATED BY A. G. CHATER

"Once more the author succeeds in creating and vitalizing the cramped yet crowded panorama of the ingrown life of the Scandinavian hinterland. Artistically the book stands out as a tour de force of sustained naiveté."

—New York Times.

IN THE GRIP OF LIFE

"The play is undeniably powerful, is brilliantly written and has a sting of reality in its analysis of motives and actions."

—San Francisco Chronicle.

PAN

TRANSLATED BY W. W. WORSTER

"One may well question whether Hamsun has ever surpassed the purely lyrical mood of this book, into which he poured the ecstatic dreams of the little boy from the south, as, for the first time, he saw the forest-clad northern mountains bathing their feet in the ocean and their crowns in the light of a never-setting sun."

—Edwin Björkman.

SHALLOW SOIL

TRANSLATED BY CARL HYLLESTED

"It has a truth, a poignancy and a quiet, tense drama as rare as they are notable. *Shallow Soil* is a novel of exceptional beauty as well as of keen psychological insight."

—*Louise Maunsell Field in The New York Times.*

DREAMERS

TRANSLATED BY W. W. WORSTER

"*Dreamers* is an idyllic interlude in the work of the master; for the reader who is responsive to genius in a sportive mood, and who can appreciate deep insight even when it is not on parade, it will provide a few hours of rare delight.'

—*Boston Evening Transcript.*

WANDERERS

TRANSLATED BY W. W. WORSTER

"We feel that *Wanderers* must have a permanent place on our bookshelf; it is the kind of book that you will come to again and again if you love great writing—if you love the feeling for place, psychology and the sense of clairvoyance that Hamsun is able to convey. . . . Hamsun stands on the heights by himself. He is one of the great writers of our own time."

—*Harry Hansen in The Chicago News.*

COLLEGE LIBRARY

Date Due

MAR 2 6 '52	MAR 2 4 '52		
JUN 2 8 1995	JUN 0 8 1995		
JUL 0 7 2003	MAY 2 3 2003		
AUG 2 5 2003			
	AUG 0 8 2003		

85

8.2 9.3 2 3 6
H 232 myEc
c. 2

Mysteries: main
839.8236H232myEc C.2
3 1262 03458 1446

KEEP CARD IN POCKET

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT
CARD BE KEPT IN POCKET